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Making news in 140 characters: how the new media environment is changing our examination of audiences, journalists, and content

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MAKING NEWS IN 140 CHARACTERS:
HOW THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IS CHANGING OUR EXAMINATION OF
AUDIENCES, JOURNALISTS, AND CONTENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by
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ABSTRACT

Technological, social, and industrial changes have drastically transformed how Americans consume and the media report news. Despite this, American news media still serve a basic, fundamental role in the democratic system: as the fourth branch of government, the press is tasked with being a government watchdog while continuing to be the purveyors of information about local, national, and international events.

This dissertation examines social media use among political journalists. The project serves three purposes. First, it provides important insight into the type of news journalists are reporting on social media, using an analysis of *Twitter* news content. As social media use among journalists and news consumers continues to increase, it is important to understand the product of social media news. Specifically, this project examines the norms and routines of political journalism as well as examining the organizational influences on news content, in addition to providing general descriptives of *Twitter* news content.

Secondly, this project provides a sampling design and content analysis coding scheme in order to examine social media journalism. As more scholars venture into studying social media, it is important that we develop the methodological tools needed for generating a random sample of content, as well as a guide for analyzing the data. This project provides the initial step towards a validated methodology. Finally, using social network analysis, this dissertation provides a glimpse of journalists' networks during the social media news reporting process. Previous scholars have hailed social media as the tool for introducing more diverse viewpoints into political reporting. By examining who journalists are interacting and sourcing on *Twitter*, we can examine if there is actually an increase in diversity as well as provide some analysis on who are the most influential voices in *Twitter* news content.

The overall project answers the following questions: What does political reporting on social media look like? How is political journalists' use of social media changing their relationships with sources and fellow political journalists? Triangulating qualitative and quantitative research methods (content analysis, social network analysis, and in-depth interviews) in an examination of *Twitter*, a social media platform popular among journalists, this project provides insight into how changes in media routines are affecting news content.

INTRODUCTION

“So I’m told by a reputable person they have killed Osama Bin Laden. Hot damn” (Keith Urbahn, @keithurbahn, May 1, 2011, 10:25 p.m.). When Keith Urbahn, chief of staff for former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, wrote that now famous tweet, political journalists were scrambling to prepare for an unexpected presidential address to the nation. White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer, had tweeted just 40 minutes prior, “POTUS to address the nation tonight at 10:30 p.m. Eastern Time,” leaving journalists, politicians, and the public desperately searching for leads on President Obama’s speech’s purpose. In fact, according to “NBC Nightly News” anchor Brian Williams, some journalists had simply received a three-word e-mail ordering, “Get to work” (Stelter, *The New York Times*, May 1, 2011).

Almost instantaneously, political blogs and social network sites were filled with rumblings of foreign affairs in Libya and speculations about the speech’s topic. However, it was not until Urbahn tweeted about Bin Laden’s death that journalists had a source for any of these speculations. Immediately, the tweet was retweeted until it spread rapidly throughout Twitter and subsequently onto other new and traditional media outlets. By the time that President Obama addressed the nation at 11:36 p.m., Bin Laden’s death was seemingly old news.

Changes in our media environment are dramatically affecting both the construction and distribution of news. Post-broadcast audiences expect to be able to choose what type of news they receive, to contribute to the content and opinions, as well as to share that content with whomever they choose. Prior (2007) delves deep into this subject in his examination of how the changing media environment is affecting news audiences. He argues that the transformative changes in the type of media available to society affects who follows the news, who learns about politics, and who votes. “In short, [it] affects the distribution of political power in a democracy” (Prior, 2007, p. 6).

Yet, these technological changes are also affecting the news content. Previous research demonstrates that organizational structures strongly influence the media content, which in turn can affect news audiences. Social media are changing our relationships, our behaviors, and our worlds. In addition, social media are also changing how journalists act. Benkler (2006) argues that technological changes have drastic implications for social practices. “Some things become easier and cheaper, others harder and more expensive to do or to prevent under different technological conditions.” (p. 31). Technology has made journalism easier and cheaper. Journalists are not as limited by geography, resources, or deadlines as they were just five years ago. Online media, in particular-social media, have provided journalists with a new way of communicating with sources, following leads, and distributing their product to news consumers. While previous scholars examining this new form of “networked journalism” (Jarvis, 2006) have argued that the focus is on creating relationships rather than creating news content, by improving and facilitating interactions among journalists, political actors, and news audiences- it is ultimately affecting news content.

The examination of journalists’ use of social media provides a new and promising research area. Analyzing how the news media and specifically, media actors are using social media in the reporting process, will allow researchers to better understand how journalists interact with news audiences sources, and other journalists. This project addresses this area by examining how political reporters use one specific social media platform-*Twitter*, a social micro-blogging site, in their reporting of American political news.

Contribution to the Field

This dissertation contributes to the scholarship in three distinct ways. First, while scholars have incorporated online content into their research agendas, they still struggle with a systematic

approach to studying social media. This project develops a unique coding structure, which combines previous research coding schemes with a scheme developed to examine social media specific traits, for examining *Twitter* content that can be expanded well beyond the study of news and journalists' tweets. Second, as the Pew Research Center reported in May 2011, 13 percent of all online adults use *Twitter* and more recent studies indicate that 40 percent of *Twitter* users are using it as a wire service (Online News Conference, September 2011, Erica Anderson). As more news audiences move online to social media sites like *Twitter* it is important for researchers to know what kind of news they are consuming. The content analysis section provides a detailed analysis of news tweets in order for scholars to better understand the type of news that journalists distribute via *Twitter*. Using the new institutionalism approach, scholars have provided ample evidence of how specific media routines, ownership models, and other various aspects of media organizations can affect the news product. Yet, the past decade has also brought tremendous change into newsrooms. The advent of *social media journalism* is one of these important changes. As part of the content analysis, this study discusses how social media are changing how scholars view the organizational determinants of news. In addition, it suggests that there are different determinants of social media news as compared to traditional news content.

The final contribution of this study is an exploration into the networks of journalists. This project examines how political journalists are using social media to find, communicate with, and interact with sources as well as other political journalists. Networking has always been an important tool for journalists. Building and maintaining social networks is not novel; journalists need to interact with fellow journalists, sources, and news audiences in order to be successful news reporters. Previously, the only way researchers could study these interactions was through case studies and participant observations. Social media journalism allows researchers to systematically study these relationships by moving the interactions and relationships online, subsequently creating large sets of

network data. This study is the first attempt at analyzing the interactions between journalists, sources, and news audiences via social media. And while it is limited by the sample, it provides unique insight into how journalists are using social media and the dynamics of a network of journalists.

Why Study Social Media as News Institutions?

For a majority of Americans, the news media are their primary source for political information. As Graber (2010) explains: “News stories take millions of Americans, in all walks of life, to the political and military battlefields of the world. They give them ringside seats for presidential inaugurations...They allow the public to share political experiences, [that] undergird public opinions and political actions” (p. 2). The news media have immense power in American society to shape political knowledge, public opinion, and voting behaviors. Because of their influence, it is increasingly important to understand the process by which news is created and distributed to news audiences.

As the subsequent chapters explain, the news media are oft described by scholars as political institutions governed by organizational practices (for a complete review see Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999). This project expands on this theoretical framework by adding that social media are news institutions, structured by their own unique set of normative practices and organizational routines. Cook (1998) argues that in order to be classified as an institution; the media must fit three basic criteria. Those criteria can also be applied to social media.

The first criterion is to have both formal structures that constrain individual choice but also less formal social patterns of behavior, encompassing both explicit rules and unspoken guidelines. Social media have both these formal structures and informal guidelines. For example, *Twitter* users are confined to 140 characters in their posts, thereby limiting the amount of content that can be included in a single post. This is a formal structure that guides individuals’ behavior on social media.

In terms of accepted patterns of behavior, think to your own social media use. Is there a “friend” or “follower” who has violated an unspoken norm on social media? What happened when this norm was broken? According to a 2012 Pew Research Center study, 10 percent of individuals on those on *Twitter* and *Facebook* have blocked, unfriended or hidden someone because they post too frequently on politics. When an individual breaks a social media norm, there are unique social media consequences.

The second criterion is that the media must extend over space and endure over time. Social networking sites represent the largest technological growth since the advent of the Internet in the early 1990s. The first social networking site, SixDegrees.com began in 1997 with limited success (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). However, today’s Internet environment is littered with hundreds of different social networking sites including the most popular sites, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *LinkedIn*. In fact, there are so many sites solely directed at connecting people with other individuals that in 2003, Shirky coined the term “YASNS” (Yet Another Social Networking Service). Social media has found extant popularity throughout various countries, populations, and networks. For example, if *Facebook* existed as a physical country, it would represent the 3rd largest nation in the world (as reported in June, 2010) with over 400 million users. Even more shocking is that it is expected to reach 1 billion users by August 2012 (as reported by *The New York Times* on December 14, 2011).

Journalists have embraced social media. In fact, according to the 2011 Oriella Digital Journalism Study, 55 percent of the journalists surveyed had active *Twitter* feeds and more than 47 percent reported that they had used *Twitter* to source news leads. The report states that this “social media revolution [is] the birth of a democratic movement” and by emphasizing some of the fundamental elements of effective and purposeful journalism- transparency, honesty, and giving a voice to the powerless- it is making journalism a better and more useful tool for democracies (Oriella, *Digital Journalism Study*, 2011).

As social media news' presence continues to increase, it is finally reaching a moment in which it is worthy of study. As Shirky (2009) explains in a recent TED talk, "What matters here isn't technical capital, it is social capital. These tools don't get socially interesting, until they get technologically boring. It isn't when the shiny new tools show up that their uses start permeating society, it is when everybody is able to take them for granted."

Social media, and more importantly- social media journalism, is at this point in our current media landscape. Not only do journalists have social media accounts; they use these accounts freely, unconsciously, and routinely. It is safe to say that social media are successful enduring over time.

Finally, social media must preside over a social sphere in order to be classified as a news institution. While social media do not occupy a physical space, they do preside over an online space. For younger populations, social networking sites are a part of routine life. A recent survey conducted by the Knight Foundation found that 56 percent of high school students reported that social networking sites were a daily source of news and information for them (as found at knightfoundation.org). And while younger audiences have already embraced the social network revolution, older audiences are also becoming increasingly dependent on social network sites for information. For example, the number of *Twitter* users has increased 200 percent in the past year (according to *Twitter*'s own website). In addition, Pew Research Center reports in May 2011 that 13 percent of all online adults use *Twitter*. As audience bases continue to grow, so will the percent that rely on social media for news.

By studying social media as news institutions, we can better understand how the organizational structures and routines practices of journalists affect social media news content. Previous research on social media has focused either on audience messaging effects or on the social media behavior of a single organization. This study approaches this subject in an entirely different way by examining the institution of social media news in order to better understand the influences

and determinants of social media news content.

Research Outline

The research presented in this dissertation examines social media journalism through a systematic analysis of both the social media news content as well as the relationships journalists are forming through social media.

Chapter One discusses the new institutionalism approach to studying news media, initiated by journalism researchers in the 1970s (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979, Epstein, 1973; Sigelman, 1973), advocated by Cook (1998) and Sparrow (1999), and furthered by more recent research (Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008, 2011; Ryfe, 2006; Ryfe and Kimmelmeir, 2011); new institutionalism approaches examine how “micro-level behaviors have macro-level consequences” (Barkema et al., 2002).

Chapter Two presents the sampling decisions and methodologies for this analysis. This project employs three unique but connected methodologies. The first methodology is a quantitative content analysis of tweets from 77 political journalists. The second methodology used in this project is social network analysis (SNA) examining the same periods. Two separate analyses will be conducted using SNA. The first analysis examines political journalists’ networks on *Twitter* and will demonstrate the most important and influential journalists (within the sample) as well as which journalists serve as connectors between other journalists. The second step in the analysis examines the homogeneity of news among the sample by examining which individuals get retweeted or mentioned by a significant number of the journalists. The final methodology is a series of in-depth interviews with political journalists from national news organizations. These interviews provide further insight into and a more nuanced understanding of the norms and routines of social media journalism.

Chapter Three discusses the results of the content analysis portion of this study. Drawing on an analysis of 4136 tweets from 77 journalists representing 17 news organizations, on six different mediums, and from six distinct news periods, demonstrates that political news on *Twitter* does not adhere to the same institutional practices as traditional political journalism. Political news on *Twitter* is a high quality news product focusing on hard news stories and is less concerned with horse-race election coverage. Despite previous theories on the social media's ability to create "networked journalism," political journalists on *Twitter* are not regularly interacting with political actors and members of the general public; however, they are sharing work from competing news organizations and other journalists. Finally, while political actors remain the primary newsmakers in social media political journalism, news tweets rarely include quotations from news sources.

Chapter Four provides the social network analyses. Social media provides many opportunities for studying the interactions of journalists in a way previously unimaginable. This study seizes this opportunity using network analysis to examine two interactions among journalists on *Twitter*: news sharing and mentioning. Results show that journalists are most frequently interacting with other journalists and rarely interact with members of the general public.

Chapter Five discusses the three major contributions of this study and outlines both the limitations of this project and directions for future research. Social media journalism is an understudied, yet increasingly important aspect of the political communication paradigm. This study is just a starting point for a field of research examining social media journalism. Political journalism is an important staple in the American democratic system. This project adds to a rich literature on the role of political journalism by examining an increasingly important medium: social media. By examining what *Twitter* reveals about the social networks of political reporters and how it affects the norms and routines of collecting and distributing news content, we will have a better understanding

of how changes in our current media environment are affecting journalism practices and political news content.

CHAPTER ONE

NEWS MEDIA AS ORGANIZATIONS

“Journalists make the news” (Schudson, 1991, p. 263). Schudson’s declarative statement is the genesis for this project examining how social media are affecting journalism. On the outset, this claim seems simple. Anytime we consume news, whether it is in a newspaper, on television, or online, we become consumers of a product- created by journalists, reporters, or some other personnel employed by a media organization. However, if we delve deeper into Schudson’s quote, there are several important striking implications in his argument. First, he acknowledges that news is created. Not a novel concept in most scholars’ conception of news programming, but still a groundbreaking realization for almost all news consumers. There is no objective reality known as “news;” rather, the news presented to audiences is a small sliver of reality. It is a manufactured product created through the routines of news reporting, influenced by a variety of different factors, and narrated through the lens of the media.

Perhaps nobody explains it better than *Washington Post* reporter David Broder in his 1979 Pulitzer Prize acceptance speech: “The newspaper that drops on your doorstep is a partial, hasty, incomplete, inevitably somewhat flawed and inaccurate rendering of some things we have heard about in the past 24 hours—distorted, despite our best efforts to eliminate gross bias, by the very process of compression that makes it possible for you to lift it from the doorstep and read it in about an hour.” And while there have been drastic changes in how news is “delivered,” this analogy still holds true in today’s media environment.

Secondly, Schudson’s statement positions journalists in a very powerful standing as news creators. Cater (1959) provides ample superlatives to choose from in his definition of journalists such as “indispensable brokers,” “agent(s) of disorder and confusion,” and “middle man... of subgovernments,” yet, he also so revered the role of journalists in American government that he

branded the press- the “fourth branch of government.” The media are so essential to American democracy, they should be treated as part of the government institution.

The reason why Cater and other scholars (Cook, 1998, 2006; Sparrow, 1999, 2006; Ryfe, 2006) are so concerned with the role of journalists in this position is because they have some control over the public. The type of news individuals consume affects a host of actions and attitudes including voting behavior (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996), political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), economic evaluations (Hetherington, 1996; Goidel and Langley, 1995), political participation (Prior, 2010), as well as the likelihood that an individual is even politically motivated (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995). Journalists deliver information that drives a variety of important behaviors in a democratic society.

As central figures in American society, journalists- as actors- and journalism- as a profession- have received large levels of scrutiny from mass communication scholars. As Schudson (1991) explains, the purpose of these studies is not to identify inaccuracies in news reporting or individual journalists’ biases, but rather to explain how an event becomes news. Since it is widely accepted in the field that while journalists strive for objectivity, news is not inherently objective, scholars have examined the variety of different factors influencing news content including sources (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), individual journalism bias (Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter, 1986), and norms of journalism practices such as beat reporting (Kaniss, 1991).

Drawing from a variety of different fields including economics, sociology, and political science, this chapter explores the new institutionalism theoretical framework into mass communication. It begins by discussing new institutionalism and the theory’s influence on subsequent news and media analyses. Previous scholars have provided ample evidence explaining why news media are organizations and can be studied in terms of organizations and institutions (for a full explanation see Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999); this study is an extension of these previous works

by examining how news organizations, and the actors within the organization, are dealing with significant changes in the current news environment. This section provides an explanation of the terms associated with new institutionalism and the basic organizational structures associated with the field. In addition, it addresses the broad economic and sociological influences on organizational behavior. This project highlights several institutional practices within news media and how those practices affect the news product. After establishing an understanding of how organizational influences affect news content, it discusses how social media have their own institutional structures.

New Institutionalism: Sociological and Economic Influences on Organizations

As Nee (2005) explains in his essay on new institutionalism, the starting perspective of this theoretical framework is the idea that institutional rules are important; and “understanding institutions and institutional change is a core agenda for the social sciences” (p. 2). Ryfe (2006) provides the most coherent and extensive discussion when outlines the five basic principles of new institutionalism: “mediation, periodization, path-dependency, positive-feedback, timing and sequence, punctuated equilibrium, and critical junctures” (p. 138). While these terms represent a complex framework of the new institutionalist strategy, Ryfe (2006) also distills the explanation further:

All new institutionalists examine the interaction of meso-level institutional variables with macro-level variables...sensitive to the historical genesis and evolution of these interactions...all [institutionalists] seek to explain the impact of these webs on micro-level roles, identities, values, and behaviors (p. 138).

Steinmo (2001) explains that a new institutional approach is concerned with rules (institutions). There are two types of rules- formal and informal- and without these rules there would not be any social, political, or media organizations. Nee and Ingram (1998) define institutions as “a web of interrelated norms- formal and informal- governing social relationships” (p. 19).

Organizations are governed by institutional practices (norms).¹ As North (1990) states, organizations “are groups or individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives...[they are] agents of institutional change; therefore the emphasis is on the interaction between institutions and organizations” (p. 5).

Organizations develop institutional practices for both economic and sociological reasons. Economic uncertainty is one driving force behind institutional practices. Companies are concerned with profit margins, but they also typically operate in an uncertain market. Economically, these practices allow organizations to create a division of labor. As Smith (1776) explains in his well-known, *The Wealth of Nations*, dividing the labor force into multiple individual components helps companies maximize resources. Each worker is tasked with a single responsibility, allowing that individual to become consumed in the isolated task increasing both productivity and expertise.

Organizational structures place each individual, and their associated responsibilities, within teams of workers. Each team must work cooperatively in order to achieve the overall team goal. This overall desire for efficiency drives both individual behavior but also organizes the team dynamic (Moe, 1984). Miller (1992) explains that hierarchy is the most effective organizational structure because it allows individuals to focus on their single task but also collaborate with others within the organization.

This type of cooperation is found throughout media organizations as reporters are out on *beats* or researching stories, and editors are back in the newsroom deciding the overall presentation of the news (what stories are covered, how much attention is given to the story, what visual should accompany the story). A single reporter, or even group of reporters, does not create a news product.

¹ There is some confusion in mass communication literature about the differences between institutions and institutional practices. This is mainly because mass communication research draws from both political science literature and sociological literature, which treat the words differently. In political science literature, “institutions” refer to the rules that govern organizations while in sociology, the organizations are discussed as institutions within their own organizational rules and practices. This project relies on the latter distinction: the news media are political institutions with organizational norms, routines, and structures.

Rather, it is the cooperation of a series of individuals ranging from photographers to managing editors, from reporters to producers. Each individual is an *expert* in their position and works collaboratively in a hierarchical structure. As Napoli (1997) argues, the hierarchical structure of news organizations encourages “profit-maximizing” behavior on the part of news managers.

Sociologically, organizations need institutional practices in order to reduce uncertainty among the individual workers (North, 1990; Sigal, 1973; Sparrow, 1999). North states that there are “uncertainties in human interaction[s]...as a consequence of both the problems to be solved and the...individual” (1990, p. 25). In order to understand how uncertainty plays into organizations, we must think of the actors within the firms as individuals.²

As previously mentioned, the primary objective of an organization is to minimize costs while maximizing profits. The same is true of the individual. Each individual is a rational actor, seeking to make the best decisions, but because there is often a significant disconnect between the information environment and the decision maker, most individual decision-making can be categorized in terms of “bounded rationality” (Simon, 1996). This term refers to individuals making the best decision based on the information available to them.

Since a significant portion of our decision-making is based on bounded rationality, individuals are constantly plagued with uncertainty surrounding their decisions. Beckert (1996) defines uncertainty as “the character of situations in which agents cannot anticipate the outcome of a decision” (p. 804). Organizations face endless uncertainty in their everyday decision making, therefore establishing institutional practices to help alleviate some of these concerns. Norms, rules,

² As Herbert Simon (1972) argues in his seminal piece on bounded rationality, a theory of rational behavior may deal with individual rationality or the rationality of organizations. The only difference between the two is that organizational rationality must deal with dissonance theory. Despite this, Simon uses the two terms interchangeably because any theory dealing with the organization as a whole, also is a theory of the individual. In addition, the fundamental premise underlying new institutional literature in political science is that the behavior of organizations “mimics the bounded rationality of the actors that inhabit them” (Jones, 1999, p. 302; March, 1994). In this same vein, this discussion of bounded rationality focuses on the individual but can easily be transferrable to the organization.

organizational processes help individuals within an organization, as well as the organization as a whole, be more confident in their decision-making, thereby reducing uncertainty.

Drawing on the previous example of a reporter covering a *beat*, despite not-knowing (or being uncertain) about the validity of an individual's claim, the reporter can rely on their traditional reporting norms (e.g. finding multiple sources) in order to reduce this uncertainty. By relying on previously established institutional practices, organizations alleviate uncertainty concerns. Sparrow (1999) argues that the importance of such institutional practices is especially true in political reporting:

The uncertainty of reporting on national politics and government is...significant. No other single industry similarly provides the texts and visual images from which other political actors and the public at large routinely learn about their elected representatives, public policy, government agencies, the national economy, and their fellow citizens (Sparrow, 1999, p. 14).

The ability of norms and routines to reduce uncertainty is also a reason why rules within organizations are so difficult to change. In most instances, change increases uncertainty thus why most individuals are unwilling to change institutional structures (Shepsle, 1986). What are left behind are organizations with well-developed, stagnant practices that govern the actions and interactions of individuals within the organizations.

A New Institutional Approach to News Media

A new institutionalism approach to studying organizations allows scholars to connect how institutional factors have organizational-level consequences. Prior to the late 1990s, most mass communication scholars had not applied this approach to studying news organizations. Yet, drawing on work in political science, Cook and Sparrow revitalized the new institutionalism approach to news media in last part of the 20th century. While their arguments differ in some key areas, they both suggest that studies of the news media should mimic how political scientists examine other political organizations like Congress, the White House, or the Supreme Court.

Cook's and Sparrow's texts worked in unison, despite their differences, in advocating for examining the news media as a political institution. So important is this main thesis, both authors included the phrase "the news media as a political institution" in the title of their book. Cook (1998) argues that the news media are a political institution because of their "historical development, because of shared processes and predictable products across news organizations, and because of the way in which the work of newsmen is so intertwined with the work of official Washington that the news itself performs governmental tasks" (p. 3). Sparrow (1999) argues for the examination of the news media as an institution because "the production of news by the media- indeed, often their simple presence-provides a regular and persisting framework by which and within which other political actors operate" (p. 12).

Perplexed by the homogeneity hypothesis in mass communication research³, both Cook and Sparrow argue that news content was remarkably similar, despite the medium/channel/outlet, because the news media are organizations and have analogous institutional practices. Both authors explain that the new institutionalist approach to studying news organizations seemed like a natural progression from the work of scholars during the 1970s (see Gans, Tuchman, Sigal) who took a painstakingly in-depth look at how news organizations operated. In a follow-up article written in 2006, Cook explains the paradigmatic transition as such:

"An institutional approach naturally followed the literature from the 1970s that saw the news as the result of organizational, even bureaucratic routines and formulas. Yet, these organizational explanations of the news could not explain why, despite considerable variation in audiences and formats, the news is similar from one news outlet to the next. To grasp this similarity requires a transorganizational understanding of the news that sees the news media as a collective institution in terms of what does into the news and its political effects" (Cook, 2006, p. 161).

While both scholars reached the same conclusion- the news media are political institutions- they arrived here from very different routes. Cook's rationale was based on a sociological

³ The homogeneity hypothesis has its origins in Cater's (1959) "fourth branch" analogy. It is the notion that the majority of the news media cover political stories in a similar fashion.

perspective while Sparrow's approach was more economically influenced. As discussed earlier, institutions are influenced by both economic and sociological factors. An organization develops institutional practices as a way to either manage human behavior (e.g., reduce uncertainty) (sociological influences) within the organization or to maximize resources while minimizing costs to the organization (economic influences). New institutionalism is based on one primary principle: there are abstract level forces that influence individual behavior. Both Cook and Sparrow agree that there are general forces on how individuals, within a news organization behave, however, Cook believes that these forces deal more with human behavior while Sparrow argues that they are primarily economically driven.

Cook's argument suggests that while there are certain economic considerations that news organizations deal with, because political legitimacy is crucial in the news business- it is the most powerful influence on institutions. "In their search for political legitimacy, journalists find themselves in a complicated, uneasy relationship with public officials...it is this relationship that news routines and practices are intended to mediate" (Ryfe, 2006, p. 139). Therefore, this subfield is most interested in the interaction (and the norms of these interactions) between journalists and political actors. Sparrow is less interested in individual interactions of journalists and more concerned with the overall functioning of the news media. Since news organizations are companies, that need to make a profit, economic uncertainty drives a significant amount of the decision-making processes. Media organizations do not want their product, the news, to veer too far away from the traditional model because they do not want to alienate their customers. And while both Sparrow and Cook have different reasons for treating the news media as an organization, they both come to the same conclusion that the news media are political organizations defined by well-established institutional practices.

But as Cook (2006) argues, “similar is not identical” (p. 163). The initial new institutionalism approach to studying news organizations in the last part of the 20th century treated the news media as a single organization. This is made very clear in the opening pages of both Cook and Sparrow: Cook (1998) writes that the “news media are recognizable as a political institution” (p. 2) while Sparrow (1999) says that the “news media may be considered a political institution” (p. xiv). And while the authors go on to explain why certain institutional practices inhibit the news media’s ability to properly serve as the “fourth estate” or “watchdogs” of the American political system, throughout the texts, news media are referred to as a single institution. Yet, even prior to the explosion of cable television news in the 21st century, the media did vary in their news coverage.

Arnold’s (2004) analysis of media coverage of Congressional members found that hometown legislators received very different coverage in their local media markets than in larger national media markets (e.g. *The New York Times*). Arnold’s work tells us how the news media system as a whole operates in a crucial task and gives us ideas of where there is openness to variation and where there is not. More competitive market environments also lead to lower quality media product. Stated simply, local news media are a citizen’s best chance of having more than a one-sided statement of facts or opinions from which to draw conclusions about incumbents or candidates (Arnold, 2004). Hamilton (2004) adds to this by analyzing how market incentives affect overall news content. His examination finds huge differences in media coverage between local and national markets, online and cable news outlets, and also large variation dependent on ownership models. Dunaway (2008, 2011) also finds variation in new content attributable to a series of different institutional practices and organizational structures like ownership models and market sizes.

Luckily for the development of the theory, the authors were not steadfast in their unilateral treatment of the news media. Recent developments have transitioned the approach from new institutionalism to studying the news media as institutional (see Dunaway, 2011). This recent

transition does not diminish the inherent worth of previous studies, but rather allows for variation in the news gathering process. “Each individual media company has its own internal institutional arrangements and external contexts that shape its behavior, decision-making, and (ultimately) its content” (Dunaway, 2011, p. 28). And while media organizations may (and commonly do) share institutional practices, the purpose of this approach is not to analyze a specific organizational structure in order to generalize to the entire news media population; instead, it allows researchers to examine specific norms and routines of news organizations in order to explain how these institutional practices affect the final news product. While scholars recognize the importance of studying the organizational factors of news production; common agreement is that we should study the news media systems using an institutional approach rather than as a single organization (Cook, 2006).

In Lawrence’s (2006) article examining newspaper coverage of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, she writes that news is a process, not just a product; and this institutional approach allows researchers to examine all facets of the news not just the finished product. There is a multitude of different institutional practices that affect the news product. The following section provides examples of how previous literature has linked the norms and routines of journalism to news content.

Journalists, Routines, Organizations, and Markets

“The main finding of this study is that the pictures of society that are shown on television as national news are largely-though not entirely-performed and shaped by organizational considerations” (Epstein, 1973, p. 258). Epstein’s monumental work on television news still holds true in today’s society. Previous scholars have devoted ample time and energy into explaining how organizational considerations and institutional practices of the news media guide news gathering processes and ultimately- the news. As Sparrow (1999) explains, “an understanding of the news media as a political

institution has to be grounded in specific, independent individual and organizational behaviors” (p. 10). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) identify four impacts on news content: 1) influences from individual media workers, 2) influences of media routines, 3) organizational influences, and 4) influences on content from outside the media organization. While all of these influences are important determinants of news content, this project is primarily concerned with influences of media routines. While chapter 3 expands on this literature, the following section briefly identifies some these organizational behaviors and explains how they influence news content.

Influences from individual media workers

As Cook (1998) explains, “newsmaking is a collective process more influenced by the uncritically accepted routine workings of journalism as an institution than by attitudes of journalists” (p. 71). The first influence deals with the individual journalist/reporter and how they control the news content. On the outset, it appears that journalists have the most control over the news product. However, just because they are the “authors” of the news, does not mean that they exert individual influence. Instead, their influence is less individual biases and more a result of the norms of journalism. As Shoemaker and Reese identify in their conclusion, just because a journalist has an individual bias that does not mean it translates into a bias in the reporting.

As such, the institutional approach to studying media organizations is not overly concerned with examining journalism biases. In fact, a multitude of studies argue against the influence of individual journalism bias in news reporting (see Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Tuchman, 1978).⁴

Described as “the strategic ritual” of objectivity (Tuchman, 1978); journalists strive to present both sides of a news story and actively remain “out” of their reporting. More powerful than a journalist’s

⁴ It is important to note that there is some literature demonstrating that individual journalists’ bias does affect news reporting (Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter, 1990). In White’s (1964) “gatekeeping” case study, during which he examined the news decisions of a single newspaper editor, he argues that gatekeeping processes can be subjective and highly personal. In addition, White argues that any definition of news must include *the individual biases of journalists*.

individual bias are the institutional norms of the news media. Three out of the four of Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) identified media influences deal with the organizational behaviors of news.⁵

Influences of media routines

Scholars have referred to these in a variety of different terms including “inevitable processes” (Tuchman, 1978), “considerations” (Gans, 1980), and “routines” (Sigal, 1973). While the term is interchangeable, the central assertion is that these organizational practices are inherently more powerful in determining the news product than individual biases (Sigelman, 1973). Tuchman (1978) finds that the norms and routines of newsrooms have a very strong effect in shaping the news and Epstein (1973) argues that organizational self-interests have a large part in selecting which real-time events become news.

Journalistic norms and routines are strong patterns of behavior that dictate how work gets done in a news organization. Norms are standards of conduct that evolve over time, and journalists gather information for their stories according to the norms and practices of their news organization (Kaniss, 1991; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1980).

These norms and practices play a large role in determining whom the journalist will select as a source in a news story. Research shows the sources journalists turn to for political information fit into a narrow section of society and situate themselves in close proximity to the news media (Sigal, 1973, 1986; Berkowitz and Beach, 1993; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). While journalists decide what stories they cover and the context of the story, one of the most important decisions they make is who to source. As Sigal (1986) argues: Sources make the news.

Cook (1998) argues the relationship between journalists and sources is mutually beneficial. Sources use journalists to relay a message, deliver a counter-message, or establish a name for themselves; journalists, on the other hand, need sources in order to figure out what is newsworthy.

⁵ Schudson (1996, 2003) categorizes the three influences in terms of approaches to studying news organization: sociological perspective, the political economy perspective, and the cultural perspective.

Yet, despite the trivial nature of the relationship, sources are extremely important in determining the types of news presented to audiences. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) acknowledge this influence when they write, “sources have a tremendous effect on mass media content” (p. 178). In the norms of news gathering, journalists look for elite or official sources to rely on for information. As Cook (1998) points out, a central bias of the news media are their reliance on official action. While providing journalists with trusted, reputable voices on issues, this “official source bias” (Schiffer, 2008) also allows the framing of an event to be almost entirely dependent on a few, elite sources.

Bennett’s indexing theory (1990) proposes that because journalists are so dependent on elite sources in their reporting, the sources can dictate the type of coverage an issue receives. For example, when elite opinion differs greatly on an issue, the news coverage reflects a wider range of opinions. However, when opinions do not differ, the news reflects a much narrower vantage point. Lawrence (2006) argues that indexing theory is a demonstration of how our understanding of the institutional routines of journalists (reliance on elites for sources) helps explain the type of news we receive as well as the representativeness of that news. When the types of elite sources are limited (i.e., the international conflict involving U.S. soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison conflict), journalists can only rely on a select few sources for information. This obviously limits the variation in perspectives, also limiting the type of information in the news story.

Norms and routines of journalism are one of the major influences on news content. Journalists’ relationships with sources and other journalists are an essential part of the news gathering process and have serious consequences for news content.

Organizational Influences

Organizational behavior refers to a series of potential influences including ownership model, allocation of resources, as well as organizational relationships. As previously explained, media companies are designed in hierarchies in order to reduce uncertainty and maximize resources. In a

principal-agent approach to studying news organizations, Napoli (1997) and Dunaway (2006) argue that the media hierarchy and the members within the organization (reporters, journalists, editors, publishers) have a lot of explanatory power over the institutional behaviors as well as the news content.

The structure of the company is another important organizational perspective in new institutionalism. The size of an organization as well as the desire for efficiency allows organizations to create departments (Miller, 1992). Media organizations create departments based on news beats and news bureaus. As Dunaway (2006) explains, news bureaus are departments within the news organization that arise out of geographic constraints. Having reporters embedded within a specific community or area allows them to develop relationships with sources, attend important newsworthy events for reporting, and increase their overall expertise on the subject (Kaniss, 1991).

The beat system is similar to news bureaus in that it is typically constrained by geography or newsworthiness. Journalists within an organization, are assigned to specific beats develop relationships with sources within the beat in order to simplify the news gathering process. The more quickly a reporter is able to contact the important sources within a beat, the more quickly they are able to report the story. Beat reporting is another important news institution that pertains to journalists' relationships with sources and other journalists. As Ryfe (2006) explains, beat reporting is an institutional aspect of news production:

“The structure of beat reporting manifests itself as a set of codes, schemas, ‘toolkits’, or recipes for action (e.g. March and Olsen, 1989). These codes speak to basic uncertainties within the newsgathering process...journalists have investments in the codes of beat reporting. They have devoted their energies and passions to mastering these codes” (Ryfe, 2006, p. 666).

Journalists also develop relationships with other journalists covering the same beat. Coined by Crouse (1973) as “pack journalism,” the willingness to share information across news outlets most certainly leads to the homogeneity of news. McManus (1994) refers to this comradery as

“plagiarism news” (p. 94). Cook (1998) recalls that in an interview with a Capitol Hill broadcast network correspondent, the individual reported that how they decided what news to cover was to look at what other news sources were covering (as reported by Cook, 1998, p. 79).

Another important organizational influence is the overall structure of the company. A hierarchical approach allows researchers to analyze organizational relationships while still offering a framework for understanding the performance of the organization (Moe, 1984). Scholars were examining the role of hierarchy is the dissemination of resources well before they were connecting these studies to mass communication. In fact, the first gatekeeping study (Lewin, 1947) had nothing to do with mass communication and dealt entirely with Iowa housewives’ wartime shopping behaviors. However, Lewin’s findings were easily translatable to communication studies. During this time period, women were in charge of grocery shopping and therefore, if the government wanted the country to consume more sweetbreads, secondary cuts of beef, they had to create messages amenable to these “gatekeepers.” White (1950) extended Lewin’s theory into the newsroom during his examination of how a single editor, Mr. Gates, made decisions about what news items to include in the newspaper during a single week in 1949. White finds that “Mr. Gates” has significant decision-making power. Sigelman (1973) finds that because a reporter’s success depends almost entirely on their ability to be published, reporters tend to cater their stories to their editors’ preferences. The product is biased but not in terms of a particular political leaning but rather as a result of the organizational relationship between journalists and their superiors.

Yet, the hierarchical influence does not stop at the editorial level. In Breed’s (1955) “Social Control in the Newsroom,” he points out that reporters and editors are controlled by corporate policies. More recently, scholars have found that ownership models can have very distinct effects on news content. As Hamilton (2004) writes, “owners vary in the degree that they seek profits, public goods, or partisan ends” (p. 24). Media owners who are more concerned with profit than serving

public interest will produce a very different news product than media owners whose primary goal is to inform the public on important public affairs. This is because what is popular with audiences (and thus, more profitable) is not strongly correlated with high levels of learning.

Research examining the effects of ownership have found significant variation in the news product. Media companies owned by a single entity are more likely to reflect the ideological leanings of that owner (Bovitz et al., 2002), have more substantive coverage (Dunaway, 2008) and focus on more localized issues (Schaffner and Sellers, 2003). On the other hand, media outlets that are part of large publicly-owned companies have more horserace coverage and less local coverage (Hamilton, 2004) as well as less issue coverage (Dunaway, 2008). For example, Dunaway (2008) argues that a corporately-owned newspaper has a 17 percent change of issue coverage in their news stories, as compared to a privately-owned newspaper which has a 31 percent chance.

Additionally, research demonstrates that there is an interaction effect between size of news organization and ownership models. Dunaway (2011) found that corporate ownership of small newspapers actually increases the amount of issue-focused election coverage while the same ownership model when looking at larger newspapers leads to a decrease in this type of coverage. As she writes, “Sometimes corporate and group ownership helps issue coverage and sometimes it hurts issue coverage” (p. 38). Clearly, it is pertinent that we consider organizational influences when examining news content.

Outside Influences

Outside of organizational influences, a media’s market can also have huge influences on news content. A primary reason for this is that news is a product largely dependent on consumer demand, and news organizations must respond to audience demands or else they will lose their customer base to a competing news medium (McManus, 1994). Outside influences can be broken down into two subcategories: economic and cultural influences.

As previously established, news media are a profit-driven industry. Therefore, the news product needs to be attractive to consumers and thus, advertising revenue. Kaniss' (1991) examines the production and product of local news. She finds that a number of factors influence local television news' coverage but the strongest of these influences are market pressures and the continuous economic motives of media owners.

Additionally, Kaniss (1991) argues that the market pressures have led to a sensationalized news product that has subsequently led to a misinformed public and poor policy decisions. Hamilton (2004) argues that since news outlets view their audience members in terms of "eyeballs" on a screen, content that attracts more viewers/readers are more likely to be produced. The increasing pressure on media companies to make money has led to an increase in soft news content as well as a decrease in hard news and in-depth reporting (Hamilton, 2004). Sparrow (2006) explains that media firms are very susceptible to advertising pressures. For example, Sparrow reports that advertising accounts for almost 80 percent of newspapers' revenue.

While most outside influences deal with audience economics, there are cultural influences in media markets that are completely separate from the economic pressures surrounding media organizations. Social norms and values may also affect media content. For example, in Gans' (1980) list of basic journalism values, at least four come from cultural and societal influences: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, and small town pastoralism. News production can be also explained in terms of ideological constraints. Altschull (1984) and Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that the news media are agents of the power figures in American society. By shaping news so that it legitimizes the current power structure, it discriminates against lower echelon citizens. Finally, the size of the media market can also affect news content. Stewart and Reynolds (1990) found that larger media market, especially those that cross state lines, have less substantive election coverage.

While organizational analyses of journalists, newsrooms, and media organizations began in the 1970s, it was not until Cook's (1998) and Sparrow's (1999) works that researchers had a cohesive framework to understand and analyze how news norms affect news content. Using the new institutionalism approach, scholars have provided ample evidence of how specific media routines, ownership models, and other various aspects of media organizations can affect the news product. Yet, the past decade has also brought tremendous change into newsrooms.

Social Media: News Institutions

As discussed in the introduction, social media are news institutions, therefore warranting consideration through an institutional framework. The following section explains how the interconnectedness of social media, in particular- the micro-blogging site *Twitter*, affects journalism practices.

As explained earlier, social media can be classified as news institutions because they fit the following three criteria (Cook, 1998).

- Have both formal structures that constrain individual choice but also have social patterns of behavior, encompassing both explicit rules and unspoken guidelines
- Extend over space and endure over time.
- Preside over a social sphere.

But make no mistake; social media are not just another type of news institution, relying on the same organizational practices as broadcast or print. They have their own unique institutional norms and routines, and also are influenced by their own organizational determinants of news content.

Recent developments leave scholars uncertain about the current state of our studies of news organizations. A traditional new institutional approach to studying organizations typically doesn't allow for changes in the rules. Yet, over the past decade, we have seen drastic changes in how news

organizations operate. How do we reconcile a new institutionalism approach with our current media environment? Newspapers are cutting staff, cable news is becoming ideologically polarized, and the technological advancements are mind-blowing. Five years ago scholars were hesitant to include online news content in their analyses, and now the reality is that most studies not only need to include online content from traditional news sources but also from blogs and social networking sites (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005).

Recent research has tried to account for these changes. For example, Peer and Ksiazek (2011) study how the use of YouTube videos fit into our understanding of mainstream television news. Their study indicates that news videos uploaded to YouTube by credible news organizations do not meet the same objectivity standard as their traditional television news programs indicating that online content does differ from television content. In another study, Lowery (2011) surveys how newspaper editors make decisions regarding their online newspaper content. The findings suggest that higher levels of uncertainty among editors leads to less innovation on the website. However, both of these studies deal with changes in format, not the institutional practices. What happens when we change macro-institutional rules?

Conclusion

New institutionalism provides researchers with the framework for understanding how institutional factors and organizational practices affect the news product. It helps explain why, in most instances, news is a homogenized product, despite medium, and it also links how market pressures and organizational purposes can lead to an inferior news product. The majority of this research assumes that these norms and practices are so ingrained in the media environment, that it is unlikely that we will see any significant changes to the news business. However, as the Shirky suggests, our media environment is going through monumental, transformative changes. These

transformations are also affecting news organizations in how they collect, produce, and disseminate news (for a review see Kawamoto, 2003; Gans, 2010; Tuchman and Ostertag, 2008, Picard, 2011). It is important, as media researchers, that we do not simply rely on previous research in this area to help explain the current media environment. This research project seeks to answer the following question: What happens to news content when it is governed by a new set of organizational practices?

CHAPTER TWO METHODS

This research project examines social media use among political journalists. Specifically, it examines the normative practices of social media political journalism, as a tool for reporting news, connecting with other journalists, political actors, and news audiences, and distributing news content. It seeks to answer the following questions: What does political reporting on social media look like? How is political journalists' use of social media changing their relationships with sources and fellow political journalists? In order to answer these broad questions, it combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The following section details the sample as well as the methodology of the content analysis, social network analysis, and in-depth interviews conducted for this project.

The Sample

This project is aimed at gathering a random sample of political journalists' content on *Twitter*, it relies on previously established sampling methodology and applies this sampling strategy to the new medium. This research is limited to the study of political journalists, referring to individuals who specifically cover national politics in the United States and/or are assigned to the national political beat by their news organizations. The decision to choose the political news beat is consistent with previous research examining the institutional structures of news reporting. Additionally, as Cook (1998) and others argue, news organizations are distinctly political organizations and reporters are political actors. Therefore, as an extension of this theoretical approach, this project specifically analyzes those journalists who are the strongest representations of political actors in journalism.

This project analyzes specific journalists rather than main news identities like *CNN* or *The New York Times* unlike the Pew Center's Project's (2011) "How Mainstream Media Outlets Use Twitter." This is done for several reasons. First, the general news entities on *Twitter* generally just

link to stories available on the new organization's website and do not interact with other *Twitter* identities. Secondly, these news handles are designated for "general" news and not about specific topics or issues (unlike this project's aim). And finally, as previously discussed, social media are inherently about creating relationships between individuals. One of the tenets of social media journalism is the relationship between journalists and their sources, other journalists, and members of the general public. Therefore, it is more informative for a project analyzing these relationships to include Amy Walter, Jake Tapper, and Rick Klein, all of who are political reporters for *ABCNews* rather than the *ABCNews Twitter* account. Most of the main news organizations' *Twitter* identities are also set up to retweet content from journalists working for that organization. In order to reduce any chance of redundancy, the main *Twitter* handle from the news organizations were not included in the analysis.

One of the unique attributes of social media is that it is a collection of journalists, who primarily work in a variety of different mediums, on one medium. Journalists from print, television, radio, and online news sources all have social media handles. Therefore, it was important to have a sample that represents as many different news mediums as possible. The process of including political journalists from a variety of different news organizations representing a variety of different news mediums was two-fold. The first step was identifying the news organizations that would be included in the analysis.

Circulation data on national newspapers was gathered from the 2011 *BurrellesLuce* (published in June 2011) <http://www.burrellesluce.com>.⁶ This study chose to include the three newspapers with the highest circulation (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*) as well as *The Washington Post* (the highest circulating local newspaper in the Washington D.C. area). The highest circulating U.S. news magazine, as reported by Magazine Publishers of America (*Time*), was also

⁶ BurrellesLuce is a media measurement service and widely used in media research.

included. Representing television news in the sample are the three broadcast news networks (*NBC*, *ABC*, and *CBS*), the three most-watched cable news networks (*CNN*, *FoxNews*, and *MSNBC*), and the only national non-profit television station governed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). National Public Radio (NPR), the non-profit media network, and two news wire services (Associated Press and Reuters) were also included in the sample.

After identifying these news organizations, *News Media Yellow Book*, Winter 2011 edition, was consulted to identify all congressional, White House, and national political reporters as well as Washington bureau chiefs. Since this project analyzes *Twitter* content, the individual reporter/correspondent was only included if he or she was active on *Twitter* as of October 17, 2011. Active on *Twitter* was determined by doing a *Twitter* search for their name as well as a Google search with their name and *Twitter*. I also made sure that each individual was working for that media organization during the sampling times for this study.⁷

In addition to traditional news mediums, this project also includes political journalists working for digital media organizations. Using Comscore's 2010 rankings, the top 3 U.S. news websites/blogs (*Huffington Post*, *Politico*, and *Drudge Report*) were identified and included in the sample. A simple online search within these websites/blogs provided a list of political commentators/bloggers. This list was then used to identify the journalists who were active on *Twitter* (using the same criteria previously discussed). Once a list of active *Twitter* users was identified, 50 percent (chosen using a random number table and choosing every 5th individual until I had captured 50 percent of the individuals from each site) of those individuals were included in the sample. Only half of the digital media journalists were included in the sample because the initial list of digital

⁷ The one exception to this is Ben Smith. At the beginning of data collection, Smith worked for *Politico*. However, on December 26, 2011, Smith left *Politico* to serve as the political editor of *BuzzFeed*, a site not known for political news content. However, since Smith's arrival to the social media news site signified a concerted effort within *BuzzFeed* to cover political news, I decided to keep Smith in the analysis. His tweets before December 26, 2011 are from his handle BenPolitico, and after are from BenBuzzFeed.

media journalists was much larger than that of journalists from traditional news organizations. In order to not over sample from digital journalists, only 50 percent of these individuals were included in the analysis.

Finally, while *Twitter* does allow journalists from all different mediums to distribute news in one place, one does not need to be working for a news organization to report news on *Twitter*. Therefore, independent journalists who are active on *Twitter* and not working for any national media organization were also included. Using Muckrack.com, I identified four independent journalists who cover national politics: WestWingReport, Donna Brazile, Jonathan Alter, and Tommy Christopher. These individuals were also included in the sample.⁸

The final sample consists of 77 political journalists representing 19 different news organizations. There have been a limited number of studies examining news on social media sites like *Twitter*. Therefore, there is not a consensus within the academic community on the best way to generate a sample of *Twitter* users. Previous studies have focused on capturing tweets from the “most followed” *Twitter* users (Lasorsa et al., 2011; Holton and Lewis, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2011). However, other researchers have brought up significant concerns about relying on this in-degree measure. Avnit (2009) describes this measure as the “million follower fallacy.” Simply put, Avnit (2009) and Cha et al. (2010) argue that gauging influence on social media based on the number of followers is not a sufficient measure of influence. This is for several reasons. First, social media, like all forms of digital media, is subject to spam accounts. Computer-generated spam accounts

⁸ Tommy Christopher is a pseudonym for an unknown political reporter who grew to *Twitter* fame in September, 2010, when he live-tweeted his own heart attack. He is a member of the White House press corps and frequently contributes to mediaite.com. WestWingReport is Paul Brandus, a former reporter for *NBC*, *MSNBC*, and *FOXNews*. In 2011, he won the Knight Foundation Journalist Award for his work as “WestWingReport.” He has been a member of the White House press corps since 2009. Both Donna Brazile and Jonathan Alter are well-known political consultants and frequent contributors to a variety of media organizations and sources. Brazile is also a political analyst associated with the Democratic Party and frequently appears on *ABC* news. In late 2011, Alter announced his new syndicated column for *Bloomberg View*.

tweet links, with the hope that an unsuspecting individual will click on that link. The number of clicks a link gets translates directly to income that the link generates. Spammers use social media, like *Twitter*, in order to gain access to more accounts and subsequently, more clicks. Once an individual gets a certain number of followers, they also have an exponentially increasing number of spam accounts as followers. While *Twitter*, like most social media sites, allows users to report and block spam accounts, the typical user may not even notice that they have been subject to spam. These problems result in an inflated number of followers. Additionally, Cha et al. (2010) find that the in-degree measure is not correlated with influence. Instead, retweets and focusing tweets on a single subject are more strongly related to *Twitter* influence than number of followers.

Other measures have been developed in order to measure online social media influence. For example, “Klout” is a measurement score developed by Klout Analytics. It looks at three different categories of variables, 35 total variables. Scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores representing a wider and stronger sphere of influence.⁹ For example, in this study’s sample, Arianna Huffington has the most followers (769506) but she does not have the largest Klout score (68). Figure 2.1 is a network map of the sample used in this dissertation with the individuals’ names weighted based on the number of followers they have.¹⁰ What is most obvious when examining this figure is that several of the individuals with the most followers seem to be on the perimeters of the network, indicating that they do not serve a central function within the network. Figure 2.2 provides the map of the network with the name labels associated with individual Klout scores. If you

⁹ For more information on Klout analytics visit klout.com. Klout has received some criticism from scholars who argue that they do not provide enough transparency about the Klout scores. Despite this, it maintains the analytic most widely used in the social media industry (Braunstein, 2011).

¹⁰ The directed edges represent individuals within the sample who follow each other. While this is not an appropriate measure of overall influence (for the reasons stated above), it serves as a proxy in this example because all of the individuals within the sample are political journalists who play an important role the overall network.

compare Figure 2.1 to Figure 2.2, it is clear that the labels in Figure 2.2 more adequately portray network centrality.

Additionally, if we look at how number of followers and Klout scores relate to the core centrality measures of a network¹¹ using linear regressions, both number of followers and Klout are significant predictors of eigenvector centrality, but in opposite directions. However, only Klout predicted both betweenness and closeness centrality.

Klout significantly predicted eigenvector scores, $b = .012$, $t(76)$, $p < .05$. Klout also explained a significant amount of the variance in eigenvector scores, $R^2 = .08$, $F(1,74) = 6.49$, $p < .05$. Klout was also a significant predictor of betweenness centrality ($b = 2.39$, $t(76)$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .19$, $F(1,74) = 17.70$, $p < .01$). And finally, Klout significantly predicted closeness centrality ($b = .019$, $t(76)$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .05$, $F(1,74) = 4.31$, $p < .05$).

The number of followers a journalist has, also significantly predicted eigenvector scores, but in a negative direction, $b = -.013$, $t(76)$, $p < .05$. Additionally, the number of followers did not predict a significant amount of the variance in eigenvector scores, $R^2 = .04$, $F(1,74) = 2.8$, $p < .10$. The number of followers was not a significant predictor of either betweenness centrality or closeness centrality.

While these results cannot be generalized far beyond this sample, these results indicate that within the network of journalists created in this sample, influence cannot be measured using the number of followers a journalist has.

¹¹ For detailed explanation of how centrality measures explain network importance, please refer to the social network analysis section in chapter 5.

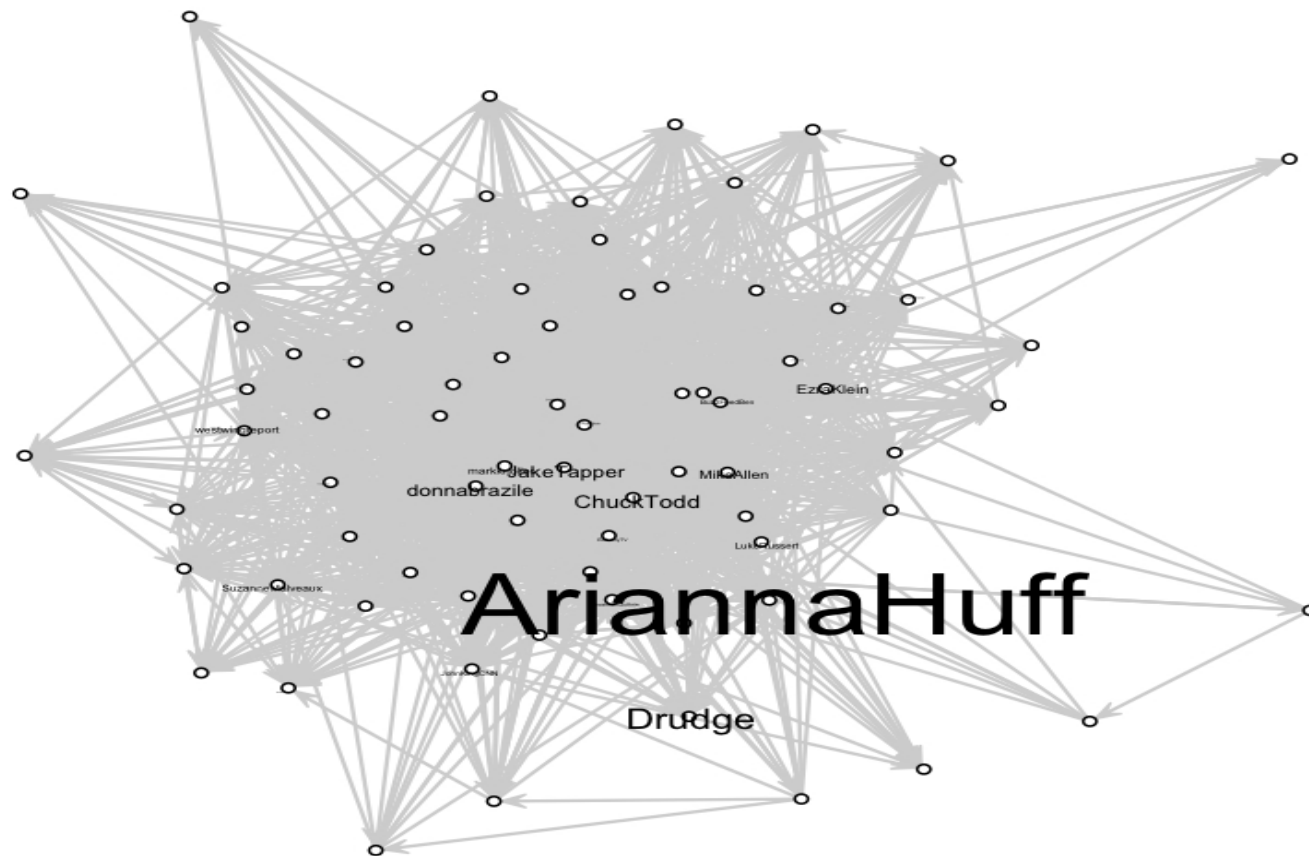


Figure 2.1. Network of Sample; Following.

Note. The label of the node is represented as a ratio for the number of followers of the individual user.

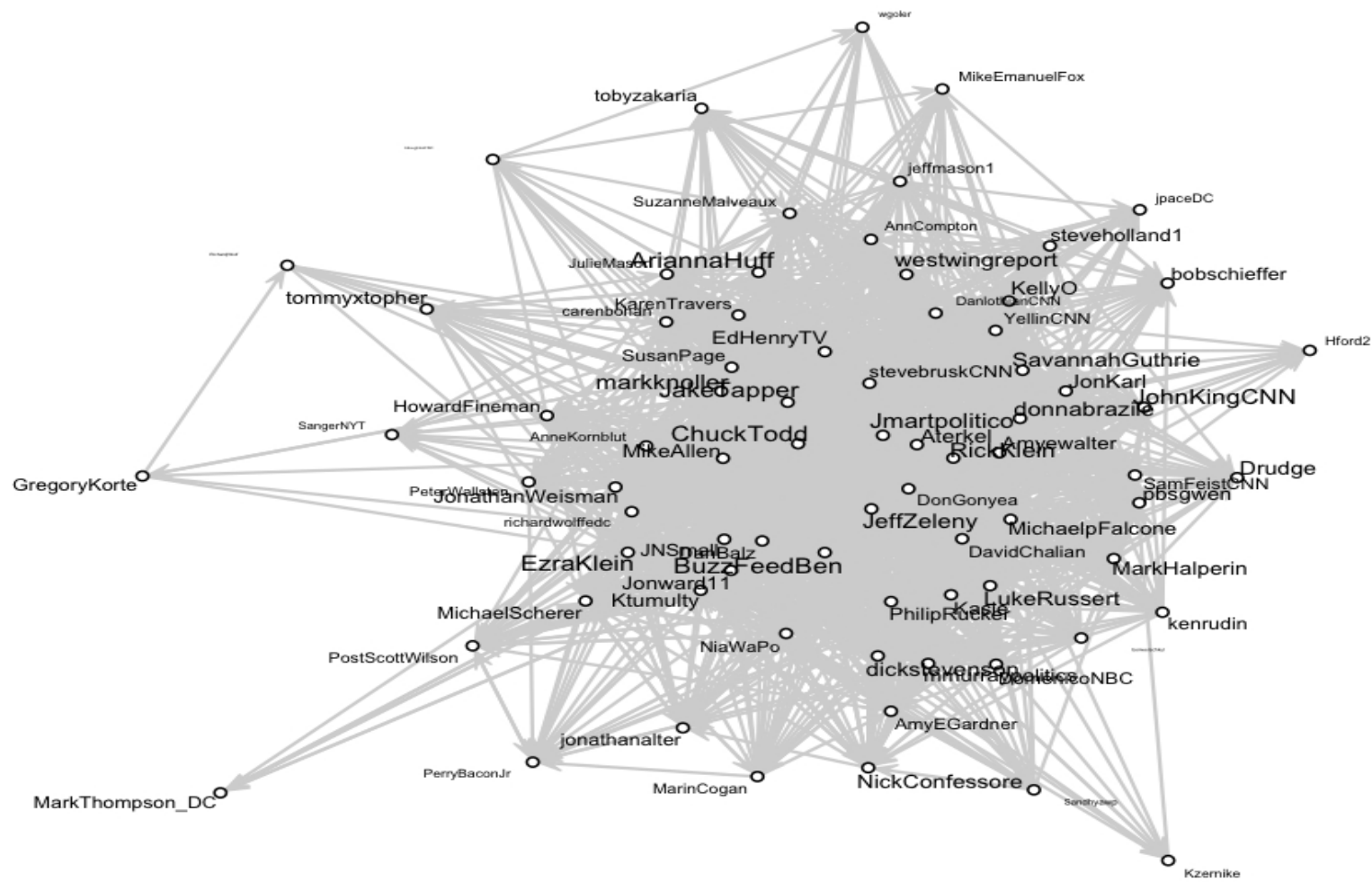


Figure 2.2. Network of Sample; Klout Scores.

Note. The label of the node is represented as a ratio for the Klout score of the individual user.

This may also be true of other specialized networks like academics, doctors, and other news beats. This does not mean that individuals with a lot of followers do not have a greater influence on public opinion. For example, marketing professionals should still target individuals with a lot of followers if they are looking to influence more people and get more “viral” advertising on *Twitter*. However, these results do call into question the use of number of followers as a measure of influence in studies of social media news, and suggests turning to better measures like Klout or other analytics (Table 2.1 presents the Klout scores for all journalists in the sample). News influence on *Twitter* is not the equivalent of popularity on *Twitter*.

The results suggest that the number of followers a political journalist has is not an appropriate measure of influence, at least among other political journalists. This is extremely important finding as more scholars are beginning to study journalists’ behavior and content on *Twitter*.

If researchers are interested in analyzing “mainstream j-tweeters” (Lasorsa et al., 2011), they need to include a better measure of influence in their sampling strategies. As the network analyses demonstrate, using other *Twitter* analytics like Klout score, are more likely to correlate with influence than number of followers. Arianna Huffington was the journalist with the most followers in the sample. However, she was not one of the most influential among journalists or in terms of interactions and news sharing behaviors. While she may be an important aspect of political journalism on *Twitter*, studies that limit analysis to the journalists with the most followers will be seriously limited in their ability to generalize to all social media journalists.

Table 2.1: Sample descriptives with Klout scores

Name of Reporter	Twitter ID	News organization	Followers	Klout score
Amanda Terkel	Aterkel	Huffington Post	10688	61
Amy Gardner	AmyEGardner	Washington Post	956	51
Amy Walter	Amyewalter	ABC	13456	58
Ann Compton	AnnCompton	ABC	5210	42
Anne Kornblut	AnneKornblut	Washington Post	8395	42
Arianna Huffington	AriannaHuff	Huffington Post	769506	68
Ben Smith	BenPolitico	Politico	55953	71
Ben Werschkul	benwerschkul	The New York Times	332	14
Bob Schieffer	bobschieffer	CBS	17988	56
Bryan Boughton	bboughtonFNC	FOX	114	11
Caren Bohan	carenbohan	Reuters	1579	45
Carl Cameron	CarlCameronFox	FOX	552	44
Chuck Todd	ChuckTodd	NBC	161202	71
Dan Balz	DanBalz	Washington Post	9171	54
Dan Lothian	DanLothianCNN	CNN	3258	40
David Chalian	DavidChalian	PBS	6273	52
David Sanger	SangerNYT	The New York Times	781	34
Dick Stevenson	DickStevenson	The New York Times	1138	64
Dick Wolffe	richardwolffedc	MSNBC	12816	42
Domenico Montanaro	DomenicoNBC	NBC	3403	54
Don Gonyea	DonGonyea	NPR	3571	50
Donna Brazile	donnabrazile	Independent	144802	65
Ed Henry	EdHenryTV	FOX	37950	59
Ezra Klein	EzraKlein	Washington Post	109710	70
Gregory Korte	GregoryKorte	USA Today	1594	55
Gwen Ifill	pbsgwen	PBS	15625	59
Harold Ford	Hford2	MSNBC	4287	40
Howard Fineman	HowardFineman	MSNBC	18218	53
Jack Tapper	JakeTapper	ABC	145186	70
Jay Newton-Small	JNSmall	Time	7485	56
Jeff Mason	jeffmason1	Reuters	256	47
Jeff Zeleny	JeffZeleny	The New York Times	15985	66
Jessica Yellin	YellinCNN	CNN	16592	50
John King	JohnKingCNN	CNN	59016	68
Jon Karl	JonKarl	ABC	14719	61
Jon Ward	Jonward11	Huffington Post	6496	59
Jonathan Alter	jonathanalter	Independent	14445	55
Jonathan Martin	Jmartpolitico	Politico	22804	68
Jonathan Weisman	JonathanWeisman	The Wall Street Journal	6275	59
Julie Mason	JulieMason	MSNBC	2680	44
Julie Pace	paceDC	AP	2166	40
Karen Travers	KarenTravers	ABC	5898	51
Karen Tumulty	Ktumulty	Washington Post	18588	60
Kasie Hunt	Kasie	Politico	6498	58
Kate Zernike	Kzernike	The New York Times	269	38
Kelly O'Donnell	KellyO	NBC	12437	60
Ken Rudin	kenrudin	NPR	7381	55
Luke Russert	LukeRussert	NBC	74184	64

Table 2.1 continued

Name of Reporter	Twitter ID	News organization	Followers	Klout score
Marin Cogan	MarinCogan	Politico	2208	46
Mark Halperin	MarkHalperin	MSNBC	5614	60
Mark Knoller	markknoller	CBS	83410	68
Mark Murray	mmurraypolitics	NBC	6675	58
Mark Thompson	MarkThompson_DC	Time	1373	54
Matt Drudge	Drudge	Drudge	258265	62
Michael Falcone	MichaelpFalcone	ABC	5182	59
Michael Scherer	MichaelScherer	Time	10210	55
Mike Allen	MikeAllen	Politico	104790	60
Mike Emanuel	MikeEmanuelFox	FOX	2352	43
Nia-Malika Henderson	NiaWaPo	Washington Post	1998	50
Nick Confessore	Nick Confessore	The New York Times	6679	62
Paul Brandus	westwingreport	Independent	81174	64
Perry Bacon Jr.	PerryBaconJr	Washington Post	631	38
Peter Wallsten	PeterWallsten	The Wall Street Journal	1283	42
Philip Rucker	Philip Rucker	Washington Post	2581	57
Richard Wolf	RichardjWolf	USA Today	150	13
Rick Klein	RickKlein	ABC	28886	67
Sam Feist	SamFeistCNN	CNN	14860	52
Sandhya Somashekhar	Sandhyawp	Washington Post	325	27
Savannah Guthrie	SavannahGuthrie	NBC	40526	64
Scott Wilson	PostScottWilson	Washington Post	604	47
Steve Brusk	stevebruskCNN	CNN	12567	54
Steve Holland	steveholland1	Reuters	3077	57
Susan Page	SusanPage	USA Today	8221	53
Suzanne Malveaux	SuzanneMalveaux	CNN	79484	46
Tabassum Zakaria	tobyzakaria	Reuters	926	53
Tommy Christopher	tommyxtopher	Independent	2990	59
Wendell Goler	wgoler	FOX	953	29

Sampling Time Frame

Previous research indicates that the type of news event can significantly affect the coverage that the event receives from news organizations. In recent history, we have seen a significant influx of event driven news (Lawrence, 2000). The institutional domination of news explains much but not all news content. “In institutionally driven news, political institutions set the agendas of news organizations; in contrast, as event-driven news gathers momentum, officials and institutions often respond to the news agenda rather than set it” (p. 9).

Event-driven news is juxtaposed to the managed news events that dominated the news coverage of the 1980s and 1990s. Managed news events developed as both an economic necessity and a convenience. A pseudo-event, according to Boorstin (1977), refers to a managed news story. It occurs because “someone has planned, planted, or incited it” (Boorstin, 1977, p. 11). Managed news events are beneficial for journalists and media organizations. Understanding the economic and time pressures on news production, the organizers of the event (politicians) typically coordinate with the media so that the events are timed to perfectly coincide with news routines and deadlines.

Sigal’s (1973) examination of reporters and government officials found that the interactions between the two parties often control and define reality. Reporters are generally unable to be in the exact location where news occurs and therefore rely on officials for details. In order to be efficient with time and resources, media organizations adapted into beat reporting. The beat system allowed journalists to not only gain expertise with a particular subject matter but also develop good relations with the newsmakers. This same efficiency led to the construction of pseudo-events. When journalists know they will be given the news at a certain time in a specific location, it allows them to spend fewer resources in the news gathering process.

This project’s sample includes both a typical news day filled with managed news events as well as time period during which journalists and political actors encountered an event-driven news occurrence.

Routine News

By examining a routine news day, the data collected in this portion of the sample will explain how political reporters use *Twitter* during their regular news gathering routines. The routine day sample consists of four single 24-hour periods, randomly chosen, representing a constructed week from a single month during Fall 2011 and Winter 2012. During the sampling of “typical work days,” days during which “atypical” occurrences happened were excluded. While this affects the

randomness of the sampling technique, it ensures that the routine day sample is generalizable to typical news days. The constructed four-day period includes the following 24 hour periods: November 3rd, November 14th, January 6th, and January 14th. These time periods generated approximately 1800 units of analysis (tweets).

Event-Driven News

The second part of the sample analyzes event-driven news occurrences. According to the research of Livingston and Bennett (2003), event-driven news is overtaking institutionally based news in the current news environment.

Two news events were chosen for this analysis: the November 22nd GOP primary presidential debate and President Obama's State of the Union address on January 24th, 2012. The content analysis includes 24-hour time periods in order to capture the news coverage preceding the event, the coverage during the event, as well as the immediate response of journalists after the event. Interestingly, both of these events generated significantly more tweets from journalists than during a routine news day. These two days generated 2274 units of analysis (tweets). Data was pulled using the *Twitter* API by 2 Code Monkeys, LLC. In order to capture all of the journalists tweets from during the specified time periods, a *Twitter* handle was created and started following of the journalists in the sample. Then, using an automated script, this new Twitter account's timeline (via Twitter APIs) was monitored to capture and store 100 percent of its followers' tweets during the time periods requested. Once each capture period was over, the captured tweets were run through another script that was then written to convert the data into a spreadsheet format.

Content Analysis

This study employs a quantitative content analysis in its examination of political news available on social media as well as the relationship between political journalists and sources and other journalists covering the same beat. Content analysis is commonly used methodological

approach to studying news content. Defined by Wright (1986) as a “technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain predetermined categories” (p. 125), content analysis allows researchers to analytically test the theoretically driven research questions and hypotheses.

In this study, the systematic coding of content on *Twitter* is especially important because there is very limited research in this area. Dann (2010) proposes a *Twitter* content classification framework by identifying a series of different types of tweets. However, within this framework, there are only four categories of news: headlines, sports, event, and weather. This clearly leaves ambiguity in our understanding of what journalists are posting on social media and how it differs from traditional news content. And generally, other studies that have employed content analysis of social media sites are concerned with marketing and branding (Greer and Fergesun, 2011) or issues dealing with health communication (Chew, 2010).

In order to create a typology of news tweets, this study analyzes the news tweets similarly to how previous studies analyze other forms of news content (broadcasts, print stories, etc.) In addition, it also analyzes the tweets for features that are specific to social media (the ability to connect with others and link to content) as well as attributes specific to *Twitter* (retweets, mentions).

Twitter allows users to interact with the site in a variety of different tweets. After an examination of *Twitter* as well as previous research on the social media site, four categories of tweets were established: original tweet, retweet, mention, and link. An **original tweet** refers to a post originated by the journalist (not a retweet or “RT”) without @replying or “at replying” to other users.

A **retweet** refers to a post that the journalist did not originate. “RT,” followed by @user and the user’s original post, identifies a retweet. Retweets can also be identified as “...message...(via

@user).” In some instances, the users post a short message before or after the RT. All of these variations were coded as retweets.

Retweets were additionally analyzed in order to determine who was the author of the original tweet and whether the journalist made a statement agreeing or disagreeing with the tweet, or if there was no statement. Original authorship was determined by performing a *Twitter* search using the handle that appears in the tweet. Retweet authorship was coded in the following categories: journalist working for the same news organization, journalists who doesn’t work for the same news organization, political actor/organization, member of the general public (unofficial source), or other type of traditional source (academic, lawyer, political commentator). If retweet authorship could not be determined, it was coded as “unsure.” A tweet must be either an original tweet or a retweet.

All tweets (original or retweet) can contain a mention or a link. A **mention** refers to a tweet that is directed towards another user. Tweets containing mentions are typically conversations between *Twitter* users, or used in order to get an individual’s attention in a tweet. Mentions are identified using the “@” character. All tweets containing a “@” were coded as mentions. These were additionally coded for the identity of the mention (see retweet authorship coding). It is important to note that sometimes the mention in a tweet is of the journalist composing the tweet. These typically occur in ongoing conversations between *Twitter* users. Any mention that was of the authoring journalist was coded as such.

Tweets were also coded for whether they contained a URL in the tweet body. When a URL appears in the post, the tweet was categorized as a **link**. Links were additionally coded for the whether the link directed the users. This was determined by typing the URL into a web browser. All links were coded into the following categories: news item written by that journalist, news item written by someone in their news organization, news item written by another news organization, blog, political website, photostream/YouTube video, or other.

Another feature specific to Twitter is the use of hashtags. Hashtags (#) allow the interface to categorize the tweet content and also allow users to more easily search for topic-specific information. All tweets were also coded for whether they contained a hashtag. If there was a hashtag in the tweet, it was additionally coded for whether it was included so that it could be easily searched for and found on *Twitter*.

Analyzing News Content

After completing all the *Twitter*-specific coding, tweets were coded for news content. All tweets were coded for the topic of the tweet and whether it was a hard news item or a soft news item. All tweets were categorized into one of nine different topics: political news, sports, family/personal, entertainment, work-related, travel, weather, and other news. These categories were developed after examining a significant number of tweets in the sample and developing an inclusive list. The tweets were also coded for whether they were hard news stories, containing “factual presentations of occurrences deemed newsworthy” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 47), or soft news. Soft news is “typically more sensational, more personality-centered, less time-bound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news (Patterson, 2000, p. 4).

If a tweet was a political news tweet, it was also analyzed for several additional categories. First, the primary newsmaker of the tweet was identified. If a tweet contained multiple newsmakers, the first one mentioned was determined to be the primary newsmaker. Additionally, coders examined whether the primary newsmaker was identified using the mention symbol, “@” and whether the tweet contained a quote from or about the primary newsmaker. A quote was determined by either language signifying it as a quote, or with quotation marks within the tweet.

Political news tweets were also coded for primary purpose (live-tweeting a news event, reporting breaking news, offering opinion on news, self-promotion, linking to a news story, routine reporting, and humor), and frame of the tweet (game frame, issue frame, mixed, neither). These

frames are consistent with previous literature examining news content and seek to differentiate between stories that emphasize the newsworthiness of a story by focusing on conflict (Bennett, 1996; Gans, 1979) and those that focus on ongoing narratives about policy problems and solutions.

As part of the coding, tweets were also coded for whether they were about an upcoming election. Tweets that mentioned polling data, mentioned candidates, or discussed campaigning were coded as campaign-related tweets. All campaign-related tweets were additionally coded for campaign frame, horserace, issue, personality, and strategy (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996). Personality stories focus on a political candidate's credentials, qualities, or personal characteristics. Issue stories focus specifically on campaign issues and the horserace frame focus on how candidates are performing in public opinion surveys (Farnsworth and Lichter, 2007; Jamieson and Waldman, 2003). Strategy tweets focused on the candidate's campaign tactics, fundraising efforts, or campaign events.

Finally, tweets were coded for whether they were supposed to be funny. As Holton and Lewis (2011) suggest, journalists frequently use humor as a tool to connect with their followers and encourage engagement. Since social media emphasizes connectivity between users, previous research finds that journalists who frequently use *Twitter* are more likely to include humor in their tweets (Holton and Lewis, 2011). Humor was coded as any effort to make a sarcastic or witty comment, tell a blatant joke, or include a joke as a hashtag.

Intercoder Reliability

One primary researcher conducted coding, with an additional coder responsible for coding 15 percent of the sample. Coding training was conducted over two sessions led by the primary researcher. Coding reliability was analyzed using Cohen's kappa, a common intercoder reliability measure in mass communication research. This is also considered a more conservative measurement of agreement because it controls for chance agreement (Cohen, 1968). If there is perfect agreement,

Cohen's kappa is equal to 1, with a kappa coefficient of above .60 typically considered acceptable agreement between coders (Stemler, 2001).

Reliability for the variables ranges from .733 to 100 percent agreement. The estimates for the *Twitter*-specific variables used in the analysis are: original tweets (.987), retweets (.886), mentions (100 percent agreement), links (100 percent agreement), hashtags (100 percent agreement). The following are the Cohen's kappa measures for all the content based coding: retweet agreement (.836), hard news (.733), topic of tweet (.928), primary newsmaker (.752), use of quote (.821), primary purpose (.733), frame (.828), political news topic (.858), election frame (.821), humor (.838). Intercoder agreement is found in Table 2.2. The complete coding guide is located in appendix A.

Social Network Analysis

In order to examine the relationships between journalists and political news tweets on *Twitter*, this project relies on social network analysis (SNA). An often-overlooked methodology, SNA is the mapping and measuring of relationships between individuals, groups, companies, organization, or any other entities. Drawing from network science, a field that focuses on patterns of connection in a wide range of both physical and social behaviors, this methodology allows researchers to dissect and analyze communication patterns and relationships and can provide unique insight into various subsets of communication research- including social media. And while Garton et al. (1997) encouraged communication scholars to explore the role of computer-supported social networks more than 15 years ago, it is only recently finding its way into communication research.

Table 2.2: Intercoder agreement

<i>Variable</i>	Cohen's kappa
Type of tweet	
Original tweet	.987
Retweet	.886
Mentions	1(100 percent agreement)
Links	1(100 percent agreement)
Hashtags	1(100 percent agreement)
Retweet	
Who is retweet?	.927
Retweet agreement	.836
Mention	
Who is mention?	.987
Is mention primary newsmaker?	.886
Link	
Where did the link take you?	.821
Hashtag	
Related to news searching	.987
Content measures	
Topic of tweet	.928
Hard news	.733
Political news content measures	
Primary newsmaker	.752
Quote	.821
Primary purpose	.733
Dominant frame	.828
Main topic	.858
Election frame	.821
Humor	.838

Note. If there is perfect agreement, Cohen's kappa is equal to 1, with a kappa coefficient of above .60 typically considered acceptable agreement between coders (Stemler, 2001). Since the kappa scores of all the variables were above .70, there is high confidence in the reliability of the coding guide and coders.

This project uses SNA in order to map the relationships between journalists on *Twitter* as well as distribution of news stories (tweets) among these journalists. Social network analysis focuses on patterns of relationships among nodes (people, organizations, states, etc...) (Berkowitz, 1982;

Wasserman and Faust, 1994). As Wasserman and Faust (1994) explain, the units of analyses in SNA are not the individual (known as nodes) but the relationships between the nodes. Network analysis focuses on groups of nodes either in dyads (two nodes), triads (three nodes), or in larger systems (subgroups or entire networks). While the nodes in the network are the people and groups, SNA provides both visual and mathematical analysis of the relationships or flows between the nodes (also called vertices).

Unlike most social science research methodologies, which rely on attribute data, SNA uses on relational data.¹² Scott (2000) defines relational data as “the contacts, ties and connections, the group attachments and meetings, which relate one agent to another and so cannot be reduce to the properties of the individual agents themselves. Relations are not the properties of agents, but of systems of agents” (Scott, 2000, p. 3). Human communication and interaction is a type of relational data that can be analyzed using SNA. In order to analyze a network, there must be identifiable relationships between people. This project uses the communications and interactions of the sample of political journalists on *Twitter* to analyze a particular social network: active political journalists on *Twitter*.

Each individual journalist in the sample is considered a node/vertex and the connections between the journalists (edges). A line, or edge, will exist between two people when one “follows” the other or if one user “mentions” or “replies” to the other. Social networks are described as $G = (V, E)$, where V represents the node/ vertices and E represents the edges between the nodes. The data was collected and analyzed using R and the software package statnet, it is presented in sociograms (network graphs) and tables presenting centrality measures.

¹² This project also includes attribute data in its analyses of journalists, although not necessary for network analysis, including attribute data adds insight into the SNA and subsequent visualization of networks. The attribute data of the nodes in this analysis includes their number of followers, people they follow, and their Klout score.

In-depth Interviews

The final methodology is a series of in-depth interviews with political journalists from national news organizations. While tracking and analyzing thousands of tweets and news coverage of these political reporters is a valuable methodological tool, it really only provides a partial picture of journalists' *Twitter* use. When social science research began studying journalistic norms and routines in the 1950s, a lot of time was spent tracking and analyzing news stories. But it wasn't until White (1961) went into a newsroom to try to explain why certain stories receive a lot of news coverage and why other stories drop out of the news cycle, that researchers were able to really understand the "gatekeeping" process. In similar fashion, while the content analysis and subsequent social network analysis produce valued results, the in-depth interviews provide a more nuanced understanding of the results of both of these analyses.

The Sample

Drawing from the sample of journalists included in the content analysis as well as personal contacts within the industry, five in-depth interviews and four online questionnaires were completed between August 2011 and March 2012. While IRB mandates the anonymity of the participants, the nine individuals represent various positions within seven different news organizations. While most of the participants interviewed are part of the original 77 political journalists in the sample, there are a few rare exceptions. The final sample consists of political reporters, social media editors, political commentators and analysts, and news editors from broadcast, print, radio, and online news organizations.

The in-depth interviews were recorded and the researcher and a graduate student assistant completed the transcribing of the interviews. Online surveys were completed using *Qualtrics* survey software. Funding for the interviews was provided by the John Maxwell Hamilton Fellowship,

awarded by the Manship School at Louisiana State University, and the Institutional Review Board approved this research in August 2011.

Interview Guide

The in-depth interview and non-participant observation process is a multi-step methodology employing Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach. Using this approach, preliminary interviews were conducted in order to develop interview questions. The participants in the preliminary interview development process were not included in the results of this section and these interviews will serve only to better the methodologies. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that this methodology allows researchers to develop interview questions with potential participants in order to better understand the types of possible responses. Similar to a pilot study, it provides the researchers with better insight when dealing with topics that have not been frequently studied.

Two preliminary interviews were conducted in order to develop my coding guide and interview guide. Both interviewees are political reporters at major news organizations. During the preliminary interviews, the participants provided significant insight into how political reporters are currently using *Twitter*, how their news organizations view the site, and how they feel about having this new type of media to incorporate into their daily reporting. Using their responses, the researcher created both the in-depth interview guide and online survey, located in appendix B.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL MEDIA JOURNALISM: EXAMINING THE INSTITUTION

Social media journalism is a significant part of today's media environment. Journalists using social media sites like *Twitter* are covering the real-time news cycle in a way that they could not do using older mediums like newspapers, television, and online news sites. Tweeting, posting, and linking from mobile devices, journalists can report on breaking news and routine news events from anywhere, with limited resources, and outside of traditional news distribution mechanisms. Reporters are now entrepreneurs who are responsible for branding themselves, keeping up with the "real time" news cycle, and interacting with sources, journalists, and audiences. Despite this, some research continues to treat them as working within the norms that govern traditional journalism. What is left is a gap in our knowledge about what social media journalism looks like. This project uses content analysis to examine the norms (in terms of both practices and content) of social media journalism on *Twitter*. An examination of 4136 tweets from 77 journalists representing 17 news organizations, on six different mediums, and from six distinct news periods demonstrates that political news on *Twitter* does not adhere to the same institutional practices as traditional political journalism. Political news on *Twitter* is a high quality news product focusing on hard news stories and is less concerned with horse-race election coverage. Despite previous theories on the social media's ability to create "networked journalism," political journalists on *Twitter* are not regularly interacting with political actors and members of the general public; however, they are sharing work from competing news organizations and other journalists. Finally, while political actors remain the primary newsmakers in social media political journalism, news tweets rarely include quotations from news sources.

Introduction

On February 6th, 2012, Ben Smith, political editor for *BuzzFeed* posted the following statement on his blog:

“*Twitter* has become political reporters’ and junkies front page: It’s faster and more comprehensive than any wire service or website, because it includes them all, along with the voices of newsmakers and reporters who make and break news there before it hits the old web (*BuzzFeed*, Politics, accessed at <http://www.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeedpolitics/politics-from-the-twitter-firehose>.”

Smith’s statement may seem startling but to the small group of concentrated political fanatics who use *Twitter* as their primary news source- it makes perfect sense. In today’s media environment, typical web journalism is slow, separated by sources, and unable to keep up the fast-paced political news cycle. Social media are where journalists, political actors, and the public go to report and receive breaking news. One reporter described social media as the “new news wires” (personal conversation, 2012). This online news trend is so important that Smith, who grew to fame during the 2008 political election season by writing blog posts for *Politico*, decided to leave *Politico* in December 2011 in order to work almost exclusively in social media journalism. Smith recognized that in the online news market, he no longer needed his blog on *Politico* to get readers. In terms of capturing audiences, blogs were out and social media were king.

In the past year, the role of social media in news reporting has transitioned from an ancillary feature to serving a central function in news distribution. Journalists no longer use social media as another avenue to attract news consumers but now rely on social media to interact with political actors, fellow journalists, and the public; as well as to get breaking news, follow the development of a story throughout the news cycle, and find sources for breaking news events. Social media journalism allows, for the first time ever, a “real-time news cycle” (Herman, 2011, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/12/burt-herman-in-2012-social-media-journalists-will-occupytheneeds/>). This real-time news cycle is such an important aspect in today’s journalism, the

2012 Pulitzer Prize Board amended the description for the “Breaking News Award” to emphasize the real-time reporting of breaking news.

Social media journalists are not reporting in a vacuum but rather are working in an outlet that encourages participation from all users. This allows duality: social media journalists are interacting with other users while distributing news content. And journalists are increasingly embracing “networked journalism” (Jarvis, 2006). News organizations encourage reporters to be active social media users, reporters frequently include their social media handles as contact information, and *Facebook* even initiated a *Facebook Journalism Program* in April 2011 in order to better facilitate news reporting through the world’s largest social network site. Social networking sites like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, and most recently *Google+*, provide two functions for journalists.

First, it allows them to distribute news content. A recent survey conducted by the Knight Foundation found that 56 percent of high school students reported that social networking sites were a daily source of news and information for them (as found at knightfoundation.org). And while younger audiences have already embraced the social network revolution, older audiences are also becoming increasingly dependent on social network sites for information. For example, the number of *Twitter* users has increased 200 percent in the past year (according to *Twitter*’s own website). In addition, Pew Research Center reports in May 2011 that 13 percent of all online adults use *Twitter*. And while a very small percent of American adults (27 percent) report getting news from social media sites, and even fewer get campaign information from social media (25 percent), social media are driving traffic to news sites (Pew Research Center, 2012). As audience bases continue to grow, so will the percent whom rely on social media for news.

Secondly, social media are also changing journalists’ relationships with fellow journalists, their sources, and news audiences. As social media editor of *American- Statesman*, Robert Quigley points out that social media has drastically changed interactions between journalists and audiences.

“Before social media, interacting with readers was limited to including reporters’ phone numbers and e-mail addresses at the end of stories...with story and blog comments, *Twitter* and Facebook, that responsiveness comes much more naturally, and more quickly. Readers can now react and be heard in real time during news events, and the benefits go both ways” (Quigley, 24 April 2010).

While the increased interaction between journalists and audiences is important, social media has also facilitated a different interaction between journalists and other journalists as well as their sources. As Cook (1998) explains, reporting has always been a collaborative juncture between journalists and sources. By opening more avenues for interaction, social media, in theory, allows for increased sourcing and more collaborative reporting. Previous literature on the norms and routines of online journalism has emphasized a practice of “normalization” (for a complete review see Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton, 2011). These studies suggest that the same norms and routines of journalism that have dominated traditional media are being easily transferred to online formats (Singer, 2005). But social media journalism is not online journalism. The very nature of social media provides tools and resources that were beyond the grasp of previous online journalists. Social media affords more information-sharing through hyperlinks (Hughes and Palen, 2009), more user-generated content (Hermida, 2010), interaction between users (Farhi, 2009), and more transparency among journalists (Hayes et al., 2007).

There is little argument over the notion that social media are changing news reporting. There is less agreement on how social media are changing reporting. And at an even more basic level, researchers know surprisingly little about the norms and practices of social media journalism. This research fills this gap by examining a sample of political news coverage on the social networking site, *Twitter*. Drawing on previous research about the organizational determinants of news as well as the unique characteristics of social media journalism, it provides an in-depth analysis of the characteristics and quality of political news on *Twitter*.

Literature Review

Previous research has long argued that news is not an objective object but rather a product constructed by several competing pressures including the organizational determinants of a news organization and the normative practices of its workers (Epstein, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 1989; 1991; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Kaniss, 1996; Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999; Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008, 2011). Significant research has demonstrated that media routines, organizational practices, and outside forces have influenced news content. In fact, Cook (1998) argues that media institutions are the strongest predictors of news content and quality.

Journalistic norms and routines are strong patterns of behavior that dictate how work gets done in a news organization. Norms are standards of conduct that evolve over time, and journalists gather information for their stories according to the norms and practices of their news organization (Kaniss, 1991; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1980). These norms and practices play a large role in determining whom the journalist will select as a source in a news story (Berkowitz and Beach, 1993; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Cook, 1998; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). As Sigal (1986) argues: Sources make the news. While providing journalists with trusted, reputable voices on issues, this “official source bias” (Schiffer, 2008) also allows the framing of an event to be almost entirely dependent on a few, elite sources. Bennett (1990) argues that sources have significant control over the type of coverage an issue receives. For example, when elite opinion differs greatly on an issue, the news coverage reflects a wider range of opinions. However, when opinions do not differ, the news reflects a much narrower vantage point. Lawrence (2006) argues that indexing theory is a demonstration of how our understanding of the institutional routines of journalists (reliance on elites for sources) helps explain the type of news we receive as well as the representativeness of that news. This obviously limits the variation in perspectives, also limiting the type of information in the news story.

Organizational forces, including ownership model (Dunaway, 2006), allocation of resources (Miller, 1992), as well as organizational relationships (Kaniss, 1991), can also play a significant role in news coverage. As previously explained, media companies are designed in hierarchies in order to reduce uncertainty and maximize resources. In a principal-agent approach to studying news organizations, Napoli (1997) found that there are several organizational influences on news content including the personality characteristics of all members of the media hierarchy (reporters, editors, owners) as well as organization type and size. Recent scholars have found that ownership models can have very distinct effects on news content. As Hamilton (2004) writes, “owners vary in the degree that they seek profits, public goods, or partisan ends” (p. 24). Media owners who are more concerned with profit than serving public interest will produce a very different news product than media owners whose primary goal is to inform the public on important public affairs. This is because what is popular with audiences (and thus, more profitable) is not strongly correlated with high levels of learning.

Social media journalism functions largely outside of the traditional hierarchical structure of media organizations. While the majority of journalists are still working for mainstream media companies, their social media behaviors (interactions with others as well as the content they distribute) is not dependent on their media company. This is one way that social media journalism is very different than other forms of “new media journalism.” While social media journalism interacts with the journalists’ news organization, the news organization has very limited control over the content. This is for several reasons. First, social media journalism operates on third-party sites. While journalists use *Twitter*, his or her media organization does not have any rights to or control over the content. Secondly, on a single site there are journalists from various news organizations. In other words, the organizations share the site with their competitors. Therefore, unlike traditional journalism, the media owners are not able to alter the product based on organizational priorities (i.e.,

profit). In fact, the only access the media companies have to social media is through their journalists. This change in the hierarchical power structure may have significant effects on the content.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Political News Content

As discussed previously, the institutional practices of news organizations can significantly affect the type of news delivered to news consumers. Previous research has established that the institutional aspects of news organizations can affect quality, quantity, and content of news. Yet, these studies have focused almost entirely on traditional forms of journalism (e.g., broadcast news, newspapers). With an increasing number of Americans going online for news (34 percent according to the Pew 2011 study), and also turning to social media for their news content, scholars need to expand their research to these newer avenues for news content.

Social media journalism is a dominant, but under-researched, force in today's media market. By examining political news on *Twitter*, this study also provides better understanding of the institutional practices of social media journalism. Previous research has demonstrated that online news organizations dramatically differ in their news coverage compared to traditional news outlets (Johnson and Kaye, 2007). Theory suggests that the unique attributes of social media journalism would also lead to a much different news product than found in traditional news programming. This study is interested in not only how journalists are using the *Twitter*-specific functions in their reporting of news on *Twitter*, but it also the characteristics of social journalism news (who are the primary newsmakers, what are the dominant frames, who are the sources, etc...).

Two main research questions drive this research:

RQ1: How are political journalists using the *Twitter*-specific functions?

RQ2: What are the characteristics and qualities of political news on *Twitter*?

Political News Quality on *Twitter*

As previously mentioned, the drive for audiences and ratings drastically decreases the quality of news. Researchers have noticed substantial changes in the context and style of news coverage of political candidates since 1970. Most notable among these changes is the decrease in hard news coverage (e.g., issue-based coverage) and an increase in soft news stories (e.g., feature and personality stories). Hard news stories are “factual presentations of occurrences deemed newsworthy” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 47) and soft news stories focus on daily life or personality feature. According to Patterson (2000), soft news is “typically more sensational, more personality-centered, less time-bound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news” (p. 4).

The framing of news content is another indication of news quality. Media frames help set the terms of debate among citizens (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Additionally, how an issue is covered strongly influences individual opinions on particular aspects of an issue (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992). These media “frames” help audiences on how to think about a particular issue (McCombs and Shaw, 1993). Political news coverage is commonly categorized into two frames, the “strategic game frame” and the “issue frame” (Patterson, 1994). The game frame refers to news coverage that emphasizes politicians winning or losing elections, legislative debates, or politics in general. This is in contrast to “issue framed” stories, which focus on public policy problems and solutions; descriptions of the substance of legislation, proposed legislation, or stories about the general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public.

Most researchers argue that that dominance of “game frame” in news coverage since the 1970s has led to a decrease in substantive issue-based reporting (Patterson, 1994; Lawrence, 2000). There are even indications that the dramatic growth of political cynicism since the 1960s (e.g., Hetherington, 1998; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) may be attributable, in part, to the tenor of news coverage.

Framing is especially important in campaign news, where coverage is increasingly focused on the horse-race component (who is leading the polls) than on substantive issues (Graber, 2010; Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn, 2004). The horse-race frame presents candidates as competitors, focusing on who is winning, who is losing, and how they are playing the game of politics (e.g., Benoit et al., 2005; Broh, 1980; Fallows, 1997; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2007; Johnson, 1993; Kerbel et al., 2000; Patterson, 1980, 1994; Robinson and Sheehan, 1983; Brewer and Macafee, 2007). And while Iyengar et al. (2004) demonstrate that news audiences prefer horserace coverage to issue coverage, they also argue that this type of political news is limiting the amount of substantive knowledge American citizens have about their political candidates.

While the number of followers a journalist has on *Twitter* is not directly equated with a media organization's market share, there are some important similarities. As previously discussed, there is growing importance of a reporter's name recognition and the digital media environment drives the desire for journalism celebrity. No longer are news audiences dependent on traditional media for access to journalists, news audiences can follow journalists through a multitude of new media platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Foursquare*, and *YouTube*. While this increases accessibility, it also poses problems for journalists. The Internet allows for non-traditional journalists to have an outlet to publish their work, in addition to providing access to traditionally inaccessible news items and news leaders. Professional journalists need to have a strong reputation and name recognition in order to stay above the masses of citizen journalists who have muddied the news environment.

In many ways, journalists have become their own brand and have the type of name recognition that was previously only afforded to television news anchors. Journalists are able to post blogs, podcasts, videos, as well as updated *Facebook* and *Twitter* continuously throughout the day. In fact, a journalist's reputation is no longer attached to the news organization that they work for, and journalists are not dependent on traditional media organizations in order to disseminate news.

We have seen multiple examples of this in the mainstream news market and one can assume that this trend will continue in to the distant future.¹³ Additionally, through a series of qualitative interviews with journalists it was clear that journalists are keenly aware of their number of followers and view this statistic as evidence of popularity and prestige. In fact, one journalist stated that in her newsroom “journalists bragged about their number of followers to each other.”

With this form of celebrity in mind, one could expect the trend of political news coverage to be focused on soft news stories and emphasizing “winning” to be true of social media journalism. As journalists strive to create their own “celebrity” and increase their number of followers, they will be more likely to report a lower quality news product, because it produces higher ratings and results in a larger number of followers.

H1: Tweets from journalists who have more followers will rely less frequently on the issue frame.

H2: Tweets from journalists who have more followers will rely more frequently on horse-race campaign coverage.

H3: Tweets from journalists who have more followers will feature hard news stories less frequently.

However, the alternative may also be true. Since *Twitter* is not dependent on audience ratings, perhaps journalists are reverting to a less-sensationalized, hard news form of political journalism. In addition, the news audiences on *Twitter* have higher levels of political sophistication than the general news audience. Therefore, these individuals may respond better to more in-depth, issue based reporting. Therefore, the following alternative hypotheses are advanced.

¹³ (i.e. when Olbermann left MSNBC, a well-known cable new network, for the unknown CurrentTV network.; and most notably when Dave Weigel, the conservative columnist for *The Washington Post* who resigned in the JournoList fallout, but whose reputation and audience base grew exponentially and eventually was hired by *Slate Magazine* as a political reporter).

H1a: Tweets from journalists who have more followers will rely more frequently on the issue frame.

H2a: Tweets from journalists who have more followers will rely less frequently on horse-race campaign coverage.

H3a: Tweets from journalists who have more followers will feature hard news stories more frequently.

As previously discussed, organizational structures can also affect news quality. Ownership model is one of these organizational influences on news content. Using Dunaway's (2008) ownership categories, this project examines whether the journalist's news organization's ownership structure influences the quality of news tweets. Hypothesis 4 suggests that the quality of news tweets will differ among journalists working at different news organizations. Specifically, journalists working at print news organizations will produce a less-sensationalized, more issue-focused news product; while journalists at publicly-traded media companies will report more soft news, horse-race and strategy focused news (Dunaway, 2008).

H4a: Tweets from print journalists will more likely be hard news, less horse-race coverage than tweets from broadcast, cable, and online journalists.

H4b: Tweets from journalists working for publicly-traded media companies will be less likely to contain hard news, less likely to be issue-focused coverage, and more likely to contain horse-race campaign coverage than tweets journalists working at privately-owned media companies.

News Sharing on Twitter

News sharing is a phenomenon not often found in other news mediums. News sharing is when journalists link to other news organizations' content. Social media journalism facilitates this by

allowing journalists to retweet, or post a news story from another journalist or news organization, to their followers. News sharing allows journalists to pass on content they find interesting, news-worthy, and relevant to their *Twitter* audiences. Yet, it also allows journalists to share content from news organizations that they are not employed by. This behavior has become so popular that a few news organizations have put forth policies regulating whom journalists can retweet. For example, in February 2012 Sky News banned its reporters from retweeting any content from *Twitter* users who are not employed by the broadcast company. Sky News' justification is simple- if the information is from a different news organization, journalists cannot validate its truthfulness because it has not been through the Sky News editorial process. While most news organizations do not have such strict guidelines, it makes sense that journalists would rely on content from their own news organization and fellow reporters than news content from outside their news organization.

H5: Journalists are more likely to share content from individuals working within their news organization than share content from competing news organizations.

As important as previous studies on how the organizational business model affects news content are, they do not easily translate to the online news market. Therefore, researchers (Patterson, 2007) have suggested that online news has its own, unique business model. This new business model helps researchers understand online-specific news behaviors by news organizations. For example, content-sharing. In a recent study of online news content, Weber and Monge (2011), found that online news sources are more likely to share content from other news sources. Unlike traditional news models, in which the content flows from one source to consumers, their study found that in the online news model, "organizations reciprocate information sharing in multiple directions" (Weber and Monge, 2011, p. 1075). However, this sharing typically consists of news aggregators (AP,

Reuters, Huffington Post, YahooNews), rather than news organizations, that produce and deliver their own content (NBC, *The New York Times*, *TIME*).

H6: Tweets from journalists working in traditional news organizations are less likely to share content from other news organizations than tweets from journalists working for online news organizations.

Sourcing the News on *Twitter*

Sources, for journalists, are an integral part of any news story. Not only do editors demand journalists find appropriate sources for their stories. Getting quotes and attributing them to credible sources are essential aspects of journalistic practice, regardless of the news medium. That was true until the advent of online journalism. In recent years, researchers have found that sources in online journalism and online news sources are not as prevalent. Despite this, individual news consumers still deem quotes from sources as indication of a “credible” news item (Sundar, 1998).

How are journalists dealing with the normative practice of sourcing in their news stories in a medium that emphasizes brevity? Social media journalism also allows for a form of sourcing not seen in traditional journalism- retweeting. In a recent interview with a social media editor at a national news organization, the interviewee likened retweeting to sourcing information. Journalists are able to pass on the content generated by the source to their *Twitter* audience. Because journalists view retweeting as a form of online sourcing, it is expected that journalists would retweet information from traditional news sources more frequently than atypical news sources. Additionally, because research demonstrates that online news does not contain as many quotes as traditional news, despite the associated credibility (Sundar, 1998) journalists working in non-traditional formats may be less likely to rely on sourcing. The final set of hypotheses deal with how journalists are sourcing information on *Twitter*.

H7: Traditional sources will be retweeted more frequently than non-traditional sources.

H8: Tweets from journalists working traditional news organizations will include source information more frequently than tweets journalists working for online news organizations.

Methodology

In order to examine the normative practices of social media journalism on *Twitter*, a sampling methodology that would best represent a generalizable sample of news tweets was developed (see chapter 2). Because *Twitter* is a relatively new medium for study there is no consensus on the best way to collect a random sample of content from the site. Therefore, great care was taken into developing a sample of political journalists on *Twitter* as well as a coding scheme for analyzing news tweets (see chapter 2).

Sample

The final sample consists of 77 political journalists representing 19 different news organizations. Organizational demographics (name of news organization, type of news organization, ownership model) as well as *Twitter* demographics (number of followers, *Klout* scores, number of tweets in sample period) were collected for each journalist. Demographics of each journalist included in the sample were also collected including race and gender of the journalists and are discussed in chapter four. A list of these descriptives is found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Sample descriptives

Name of Reporter	Twitter ID	News organization	Type	Followers	Total number of tweets in sample	Average number of tweets
Amy Gardner	AmyEGardner	Washington Post	Newspaper	956	16	2.67
Amy Walter	Amyewalter	ABC	Broadcast	13456	57	9.50
Ann Compton	AnnCompton	ABC	Broadcast	5210	2	0.33
Anne Kornblut	AnneKornblut	Washington Post	Newspaper	8395	0	0.00
Arianna Huffington	AriannaHuff	Huffington Post	Blog	769506	66	11.00
Amanda Terkel	Aterkel	Huffington Post	Blog	10688	127	21.17
Bryan Boughton	bboughtonFNC	FOX	Cable	114	0	0.00
Ben Smith	BenPolitico	Politico	Blog	55953	341	56.83
Ben Werschkul	benwerschkul	The New York Times	Newspaper	332	0	0.00
Bob Schieffer	bobschieffer	CBS	Broadcast	17988	2	0.33
Caren Bohan	carenbohan	Reuters	Wire	1579	36	6.00
Carl Cameron	CarlCameronFox	FOX	Cable	552	5	0.83
Chuck Todd	ChuckTodd	NBC	Broadcast	161202	139	23.17
Dan Balz	DanBalz	Washington Post	Newspaper	9171	4	0.67
Dan Lothian	DanlothianCNN	CNN	Cable	3258	9	1.50
David Chalian	DavidChalian	PBS	Broadcast	6273	11	1.83
Dick Stevenson	DickStevenson	The New York Times	Newspaper	1138	35	5.83
Domenico Montanaro	DomenicoNBC	NBC	Broadcast	3403	138	23.00
Don Gonyea	DonGonyea	NPR	Radio	3571	91	15.17
Donna Brazile	donnabrazile	Independent	Independent	144802	125	20.83
Matt Drudge	Drudge	Drudge	Blog	258265	1	0.17
Ed Henry	EdHenryTV	FOX	Cable	37950	83	13.83
Ezra Klein	EzraKlein	Washington Post	Newspaper	109710	145	24.17
Gregory Korte	GregoryKorte	USA Today	Newspaper	1594	14	2.33
Harold Ford	Hford2	MSNBC	Cable	4287	1	0.17

Table 3.1 continued

Name of Reporter	Twitter ID	News organization	Type	Followers	Total number of tweets in sample	Average number of tweets
Howard Fineman	HowardFineman	MSNBC	Cable	18218	40	6.67
Jack Tapper	JakeTapper	ABC	Broadcast	145186	145	24.17
Jeff Mason	jeffmason1	Reuters	Wire	256	2	0.33
Jeff Zeleny	JeffZeleny	The New York Times	Newspaper	15985	41	6.83
Jonathan Martin	Jmartpolitico	Politico	Blog	22804	205	34.17
Jay Newton-Small	JNSmall	Time	Magazine	7485	40	6.67
John King	JohnKingCNN	CNN	Cable	59016	60	10.00
Jonathan Alter	jonathanalter	Independent	Independent	14445	23	3.83
Jonathan Weisman	JonathanWeisman	The Wall Street Journal	Newspaper	6275	14	2.33
Jon Karl	JonKarl	ABC	Broadcast	14719	22	3.67
Jon Ward	Jonward11	Huffington Post	Blog	6496	222	37.00
Julie Pace	jpacDC	AP	Wire	2166	5	0.83
Julie Mason	JulieMason	MSNBC	Cable	2680	3	0.50
Karen Travers	KarenTravers	ABC	Broadcast	5898	48	8.00
Kasie Hunt	Kasie	Politico	Blog	6498	22	3.67
Kelly O'Donnell	KellyO	NBC	Broadcast	12437	106	17.67
Ken Rudin	kenrudin	NPR	Radio	7381	7	1.17
Karen Tumulty	Ktumulty	Washington Post	Newspaper	18588	64	10.67
Kate Zernike	Kzernike	The New York Times	Newspaper	269	9	1.50
Luke Russert	LukeRussert	NBC	Broadcast	74184	152	25.33
Marin Cogan	MarinCogan	Politico	Blog	2208	30	5.00
Mark Halperin	MarkHalperin	MSNBC	Cable	5614	35	5.83
Mark Knoller	markknoller	CBS	Broadcast	83410	241	40.17
Mark Thompson	MarkThompson_DC	Time	Magazine	1373	17	2.83
Michael Falcone	MichaelpFalcone	ABC	Broadcast	5182	57	9.50
Michael Scherer	MichaelScherer	Time	Magazine	10210	112	18.67
Mike Allen	MikeAllen	Politico	Blog	104790	42	7.00

Table 3.1 continued

Name of Reporter	Twitter ID	News organization	Type	Followers	Total number of tweets in sample	Average number of tweets
Mike Emanuel	MikeEmanuelFox	FOX	Cable	2352	15	2.50
Mark Murray	mmurraypolitics	NBC	Broadcast	6675	58	9.67
Nia-Malika Henderson	NiaWaPo	Washington Post	Newspaper	1998	4	0.67
Nick Confessore	Nick Confessore	The New York Times	Newspaper	6679	109	18.17
Gwen Ifill	pbsgwen	PBS	Broadcast	15625	26	4.33
Perry Bacon Jr.	PerryBaconJr	Washington Post	Newspaper	631	12	2.00
Peter Wallsten	PeterWallsten	The Wall Street Journal	Newspaper	1283	0	0.00
Philip Rucker	Philip Rucker	Washington Post	Newspaper	2581	22	3.67
Scott Wilson	PostScottWilson	Washington Post	Newspaper	604	6	1.00
Richard Wolf	RichardjWolf	USA Today	Newspaper	150	0	0.00
Dick Wolffe	richardwolffedc	MSNBC	Cable	12816	7	1.17
Rick Klein	RickKlein	ABC	Broadcast	28886	205	34.17
Sam Feist	SamFeistCNN	CNN	Cable	14860	6	1.00
Sandhya Somashekhar	Sandhyawp	Washington Post	Newspaper	325	0	0.00
David Sanger	SangerNYT	The New York Times	Newspaper	781	0	0.00
Savannah Guthrie	SavannahGuthrie	NBC	Broadcast	40526	23	3.83
Steve Brusk	stevebruskCNN	CNN	Cable	12567	26	4.33
Steve Holland	stevholland1	Reuters	Wire	3077	18	3.00
Susan Page	SusanPage	USA Today	Newspaper	8221	25	4.17
Suzanne Malveaux	SuzanneMalveaux	CNN	Cable	79484	3	0.50
Tabassum Zakaria	tobyzakaria	Reuters	Wire	926	35	5.83
Tommy Christopher	tommyxtopher	Independent	Independent	2990	95	15.83
Paul Brandus	westwingreport	Independent	Independent	81174	234	39.00
Wendell Goler	wgoler	FOX	Cable	953	0	0.00
Jessica Yellin	YellinCNN	CNN	Cable	16592	10	1.67

Sampling time periods

As discussed in chapter 2, two type of news coverage were sampled: event-driven news and routine news. The routine news time periods consist of a constructed four-day period with the following 24-hour periods: November 3rd, November 14th, January 6th, and January 14th. These time periods generated approximately 1800 units of analysis (tweets). The event-driven news sample includes two distinct news events: the November 22nd GOP primary presidential debate and President Obama's State of the Union address on January 24th, 2012. The content analysis includes 24-hour time periods in order to capture the news coverage preceding the event, the coverage during the event, as well as the immediate response of journalists after the event. Interestingly, both of these events generated significantly more tweets from journalists than during a routine news days. These two days generated 2274 units of analysis (tweets).

Results

Journalists' Use of *Twitter*

The final dataset consists of 4136 tweets¹⁴ from 77 political journalists over 6 different 24-hour periods. Over 70 percent of the tweets (2928) were original tweets generated by the individual journalist while 29.1 percent (1204) were tweets that were retweeted (generated from a different *Twitter* user). Slightly more than half (55 percent) of the tweets are from event-driven coverage while the four days representing routine news days generated 1862 tweets (45 percent of the sample). This is despite the fact that only two days were event-driven coverage.

The number of tweets per journalist ranges from 0 to 341 ($M = 53.91$). Eight journalists did not have a single tweet in the sample.¹⁵ As expected, journalists tweeted most frequently on days that

¹⁴ A tweet is the term used for a post on the social media site *Twitter*, the medium analyzed in this study. This project refers to the units of analyses as tweets throughout the results section.

¹⁵ Anne Kornblut, Bryan Boughton, Ben Werschkul, Peter Wallsten, Richard Wolf, Sandhya Somashekhar,

included an event-driven news event. On November 22nd, journalists averaged 14.10 tweets and 15.65 tweets on January 24th. Interestingly, non-online journalists produced many more tweets on those days than during the normal news days, 27.3 percent and 31.3 percent respectively. This may be due to the restrictions that the news hole places on traditional journalists. Print journalists, broadcast journalists, and to some extent-even cable journalists, are only given a certain amount of time/space to report the news. Online journalists, on the other hand, have an infinite amount of space for their reporting. On these event-driven news days, traditional journalists may be using social media as their outlet for excess information while online journalists do not need to use the medium in the same way.

The average number of tweets on routine news days was 6.04. January 14th generated the fewest number of tweets (277) and the smallest average number of tweets by journalists (3.57). This is probably due to the fact that it is a Saturday and not part of the traditional work week during which politicians are generating news and journalists are reporting on that news.

A complete list of the number of tweets by journalists is found in Table 3.1.

The first research question investigates how political journalists are using the *Twitter* functionalities in their use of *Twitter* use (for a complete list of the frequencies, see Table 3.2). The majority (70.8 percent) of tweets from the political journalists were original tweets while 29.1 percent were retweets. When examining the retweets ($n=1204$), 84.6 of the retweets did not contain any additional content provided by the journalist. However, in the cases ($n=185$) where a journalist included a comment with a retweet, it is more likely that the comment agrees with the retweet (93 percent) than expressing disagreement or criticism (7 percent). This is especially telling since journalists frequently include the disclaimer “Retweets are not endorsements” in their *Twitter* profiles.

David Sanger are all active on *Twitter* but did not tweet on the days included in the sample. Wendell Goler was mistakenly included in the sample. He has not been active on *Twitter* since April 2011.

Table 3.2: Frequency distributions of *Twitter*-specific variables

Variable	Frequency (%)	N
Original tweet	70.8	2928
Retweet	29.2	1208
Journalist in same news organization	22.4	270
Journalist in different news organization	48.1	579
Political actor	10.4	125
Non-traditional source	10.9	131
Agree with retweet	14.3	172
Disagree with retweet	1.1	13
Neither	84.6	1019
Mention	19.8	817
Journalist in same news organization	27.9	228
Journalist in different news organization	28.3	231
Political actor	23.3	190
Non-traditional source	2.3	19
Is this mention the primary newsmaker?	35.0	273
Link	31.8	1315
Self-authored news story	19.3	252
Organization-authored news story	29.2	370
News story by another news organization	26.1	331
Blog	3.3	56
Political website	1.9	24
Photostream/YouTube video	13.3	169
Hashtag	18.8	777
Related to news-searching	85.8	649

One of the main functionalities of *Twitter* is the ability to link to other users by including them as a “mention.” Twenty percent of the tweets analyzed included at least one mention in the tweet content. Yet, the journalists are not using the mention function as a way to “tag” the primary newsmaker of their tweet. Only 35 percent of the mentions ($n= 781$) were the primary newsmakers of the tweet. The majority of the mentions were other journalists. Fifty-six percent of the mentions were journalists (27.9 percent were journalists working at the same news organization as the journalist who tweeted and 28.3 percent were journalists working at different news organizations).

Only 23.3 percent of the mentions were of political actors or political organizations. Yet, this is still considerably more than the number of mentions who are members of the general public and considered unofficial sources. Only 2.3 percent of the mentions were categorized as “general public.”

As *Mashable* writer Ben Parr argues, one of the most important, and yet complex, features of *Twitter* is the hashtag function (<http://mashable.com/2009/05/17/twitter-hashtags/>). The hashtag allows users to easily spread and organize information on *Twitter*. It is especially important for journalists who can use the hashtag to disseminate information to a larger audience, including individuals who are not following that specific journalist. For example, during the Republican debates, journalists relied both on generic hashtags, #GOPdebate and #2012, as well as media organization specific hashtags, #GOPdebateNBC. This allows users, and journalists, to capture a collection of tweets on a single subject and in some instances, catering to a specific audience base (i.e., NBC news). Despite its important functionality, only 18.8 percent of the tweets included hashtags ($n=777$). The majority of these hashtags were searchable and dealt with a news item (85.8 percent), but the number of tweets including hashtags was quite small.

Finally, *Twitter* allows users to link to additional content through hyperlinks embedded within the tweet content. Almost one-third of the tweets in the sample included links (31.8 percent). The majority of the links were to news stories written by journalists working at the same news organization as the journalist who tweeted (29.2 percent). This is expected, as journalist would want to share their news organizations’ content to all of their *Twitter* followers. What is unexpected is that a higher percentage of the links were to news stories from a different organization (26.1 percent) than to news stories written by the journalist who tweeted (19.9 percent). Additionally, a relatively small percentage of the links were to blogs (4.4 percent) and political websites (1.9 percent).

Political News on *Twitter*

The second research question examines the characteristics and qualities of political news on *Twitter*. Of the 4136 tweets analyzed, 3347 were about a political news story (80.9 percent). The second most frequent topic (6.6 percent) dealt with the journalists' work (campaign travel, self-promotion on upcoming news programs, coworker banter). This analyses deals solely with the 3347 tweets containing political news content.

Recent research demonstrates the soft news content has dominated the news environment over the past several decades. Prior (2003) describes this trend as a "proliferation," while other scholars acknowledge that the news media are simply catering to lowest common denominator and providing the type of news that audiences demand (Zaller, 1999). And while scholars disagree about whether soft news programming is hurting (Prior, 2003) or helping (Baum, 2002) the electorate; there is no disagreement in the belief that media organizations have chosen to provide soft news programming over hard news programming in recent decades. Using the common definitions of hard and soft news, this project coded all political news tweets on whether they fit into the soft news category or hard news category. The results are striking. Over 54 percent of the political news tweets were categorized as hard news while only 45 percent were soft news.

In order to further analyze this, logistic regressions¹⁶ controlling for the fixed effects of journalists¹⁷ whom tweeted the content, were conducted in order to examine if the topic of the tweet and the purpose of the tweet significantly altered whether it was a hard news or soft news tweets. When examining the relationship between the topic of the political news tweet and whether it was hard or soft news, the logistic regression was significant, $\chi^2(70, N=3003) = 286.1, p < .001$. Tweets

¹⁶ Likelihood ratio tests were conducted comparing the log likelihoods of the fixed effects models and the models without including the control measure of journalists for each of the analyses included in the results. The likelihood ratio test for each analysis is included in the corresponding footnote. $\chi^2(69) = 260.57, p < .001$.

¹⁷ Fixed effects were controlled by creating dummy variables for each individual journalist and including the variables in the model. The logistic regression statistics for the fixed effect variables are available upon request.

focused on the mainstream media had the highest frequency of soft news tweets (69.7 percent) compared to hard news tweets (30.3 percent), while more of the legislation-focused tweets were hard news tweets (80.8 percent) than soft news tweets (19.2 percent). It is important to note that campaign-focused tweets had the second highest percentage of soft news tweets (46.3 percent).

Table 3.3: Cross-tabulations examining the relationship between hard news and political news topic.

	Hard News	Soft News
Topic of political news		
Legislature	122 (80.8%)	29 (19.2%)
Foreign affairs	37 (75.5%)	12 (24.5%)
National security	45 (57.0%)	34 (43.0%)
Economy	180 (71.1%)	73 (28.9%)
Campaign	935 (53.7%)	807 (46.3%)
President Obama	389 (58.7%)	274 (41.3%)
Mainstream media	27 (30.0%)	63 (70.0%)

Note. $\chi^2(6, N=3027) = 96.2, p < .001$. The chi-square results are presented in this table in order to report the cross-tabulations. Logistic regressions results with fixed effects are presented in the in-text analysis. Both analyses are significant.

The relationship between the purpose of the tweet and whether it was hard or soft news is also significant, $\chi^2(70, N=3299) = 259.55, p < .001$.¹⁸ As expected, the majority of tweets whose purpose of the tweet was to be humorous were categorized as soft news (91.5 percent). However, when reporters are live-tweeting a news event, there is not a significant difference in the frequencies of hard and soft news tweets. Of the 884 tweets that were live-tweets of news events, 54.1 percent

¹⁸ Likelihood ratio test, $\chi^2(69)=258.93, p < .001$.

were hard news and 45.9 percent were soft news. This is compared to the 88.8 percent of tweets that were reporting breaking news categorized as hard news tweets (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Cross-tabulations examining the relationship between hard news and purpose of tweet

	Hard News	Soft News
Primary purpose of tweet		
Live-tweeting news event	478 (54.1%)	406 (45.9%)
Report breaking news	111 (88.8%)	14 (11.2%)
Offer opinion on news event	178 (37.1%)	302 (62.9%)
Self-promotion	48 (45.3%)	58 (54.7%)
Link to a news story	239 (59.8%)	161 (40.3%)
Routine news reporting	722 (76.0%)	228 (24.0%)
Provide humor/ Entertain	30 (8.5%)	324 (91.5%)

Note. $\chi^2(6, N=3295) = 604.67, p < .001$. The chi-square results are presented in this table in order to report the cross-tabulations. Logistic regressions results with fixed effects are presented in the in-text analysis. Both analyses are significant.

Tweets were also coded for frame- the storyline that audiences use in order to understand the news (Brewer and Sigelman, 2002). The majority of the framing research examining political news places the content into two categories: game frame and issue frame. This research continues with this tradition but also allows for a mixed frame (game and issue) and the absence of either frame. The results are consistent with previous research suggesting a prevalence of game frames within political news. Thirty percent of the political news tweets contain a game frame. However, these results are not nearly as stark as previous research with almost 28 percent of the tweets

containing the issue frame and 2.3 percent containing a mixed frame. Similar to the results on hard and soft news, campaign tweets are most frequently associated with a game frame (45.4 percent).

Table 3.5 contains full results.

Table 3.5: Cross-tabulations examining the relationship between political news topic and frame

	Game Frame	Issue Frame	Mixed Frame	None
Topic of political news				
Legislature	41 (27.2%)	101 (66.9%)	1 (.7%)	8 (5.3%)
Foreign affairs	7 (14.3%)	36 (73.5%)	2 (4.1%)	4 (8.2%)
National security	5 (6.3%)	60 (75.9%)	0 (0%)	14 (17.7%)
Economy	20 (7.9%)	184 (72.7%)	3 (1.2%)	46 (18.2%)
Campaign	791 (45.4%)	263 (15.1%)	48 (2.8%)	640 (36.7%)
President Obama	124 (18.7%)	225 (33.9%)	14 (2.1%)	300 (45.2%)
Mainstream media	9 (10.0%)	21 (23.3%)	6 (6.7%)	54 (60.0%)

Additionally, all campaign-focused tweets were also analyzed for campaign frames (horserace, strategy, issue, and personality). There were 1742 campaign-focused tweets in the sample. The majority of campaign tweets included a strategy frame (38.3 percent). Yet, unlike previous research, both the issue frame (24.6 percent) and personality frame (22.8 percent) were more frequent than the horserace frame (14.3 percent). For example, in Dunaway's (2010) analysis of election coverage, more than half (57 percent) of the stories were categorized as strategy coverage and 22 percent were horserace coverage.

Tweets were also coded for humor. Research indicates that journalists may use humor on *Twitter* in order create higher levels of engagement with their followers. This research supports that hypothesis. Almost 15 percent of the political news tweets included an attempt at humor by the

journalist and 10.7 percent of the tweets' primary purpose was to provide entertainment or be humorous.

One of the primary benefits of journalists using social media is the immediacy of relaying breaking information to consumers. There were 125 instances in the sample of journalists using *Twitter* in order to report breaking political news. As expected, 88.8 percent of these tweets were categorized as hard news and only 6.4 percent contained a quote. It is interesting to note that while one of the presumed major contributions of social media journalism is its ability to cover the "real-time news cycle," less than 4 percent of the news tweets were focused on covering a breaking news story. The majority of tweets were either of journalists live-tweeting news events (26.8 percent) or just part of routine news reporting (23 percent).

Analyzing News Quality

The first set of hypotheses suggests that the quality of the news tweets is dependent on the number of followers a journalist has on *Twitter*. Previous research suggests that soft news coverage, the game frame, and horse-race focused campaign news is preferred by audiences, and therefore journalists more concerned with audience ratings have a proclivity towards this type of news coverage. In fact, Lawrence (2000) argues that not only are journalists relying on the "game frame" more frequently in their news coverage, but they are also reporting issue-based stories less frequently

In order to examine the relationship between social media popularity on news quality, a series of logistic regression models were performed examining the whether the number of followers a journalist is a predictor on news quality.¹⁹ In order to account for the "million follower fallacy" problem mentioned earlier (Avnit, 2009), instead of using the number of followers each journalist

¹⁹ All of the models also controlled for the fixed effects of journalist. Likelihood ratio tests for hard news, $\chi^2(133)=373.5, p<.001$. Likelihood ratio tests for issue frame, $\chi^2(67)=341.44, p<.001$. Likelihood ratio tests for horserace frame, $\chi^2(53)=124.37, p<.001$.

has, this project uses the natural log of the follower count. This measure ranges from 5.55 to 13.55 ($M= 9.92$, $SD= 1.42$). Three measures of news quality were included as separate, dichotomous dependent variables: horse-race frame, issue frame, and hard news content.

The number of followers a journalist has is a significant predictor of both hard news coverage and reliance on the issue frame in political news coverage. The number of followers significantly predicted news quality in terms of prevalence of hard news coverage and issue-frame. It did not significantly predict horse-race coverage. While not significant, journalists with more followers are less likely to use the horse-race frame in their coverage of an election. Journalists with more followers are significant more likely to use an issue frame in their political news tweets (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Logistic regression predicting news quality of political news tweets by number of followers

	β	SE β	Wald's χ^2	df	p	(e^b)
Hard News						
Followers	-.060	.022	7.660	1	.006**	.942
Constant	.410	.231	3.145	1	.076+	1.507
Pseudo $R^2 = .003$						
Horse-race coverage						
Followers	-.076	.060	1.585	1	.208	.927
Constant	-1.228	.634	3.753	1	.053+	.293
Pseudo $R^2 = .006$						
Issue Frame						
Followers	.117	.028	17.599	1	.000**	1.124
Constant	-2.386	.295	65.299	1	.000**	.092
Pseudo $R^2 = .013$						

Note. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. $N = 3347$. Reported above are the logistic regression models with the fixed effect of journalists. The fixed effect of journalists was significant for issue frame, but not hard news or horse-race coverage.

Additionally, tweets from journalists with more followers are significantly less likely to have hard news tweets (see Figure 3.1).

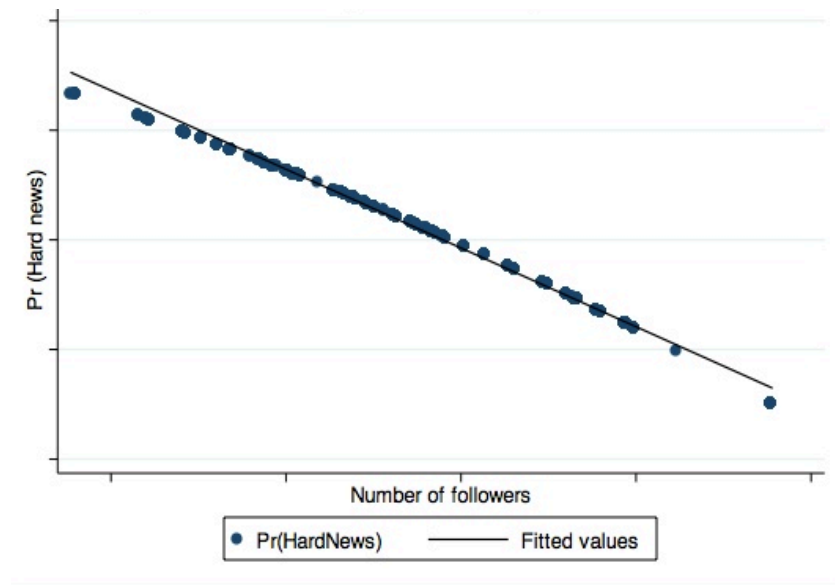


Figure 3.1: Probability of hard news by number of followers

The number of followers a journalist has on *Twitter* is a significant predictor of news quality, but in opposite directions in terms of hard news and issue frame. While tweets from journalists with more followers are more likely to be framed around issues and less likely to focus on horse-race coverage (though not significantly), they are also less likely to be considered hard news. Therefore, H1a and H3 are supported. Popular journalists on *Twitter* provide soft news coverage on issues.

The number of followers a journalist has may be indicative of other organizational influences including more resources and different ownership models. As previously discussed, organizational structures can also affect news quality. In order to examine how a journalist's news organization affects news quality, logistic regressions²⁰ were conducted using a series of company-based

²⁰ All of the models also controlled for the fixed effects of journalist. Likelihood ratio tests for hard news, $\chi^2(130)=349.11, p<.001$. Likelihood ratio tests for issue frame, $\chi^2(65)=321.8, p<.001$. Likelihood ratio tests for horserace frame, $\chi^2(52)=107.41, p<.001$.

predictors. The predictors included in the models are print medium, independent journalist, and whether the media organization is a publicly traded corporate media company (Dunaway, 2008). Print journalists were included as a predictor variable because traditionally, print is described as the “golden standard” for journalism. And while political news stories in newspapers are increasingly more horse-race coverage, less policy issue-oriented, and more soft news-focused, the trend is occurring at a much slower rate. Independent journalists were also included because these individuals are not working for any news organization and therefore should be immune to the ratings-driven pressure that is affecting traditional news content. Once again, three dichotomous dependent variables were included as measures of news quality: hard news content, horse-race frame, and issue frame.

Table 3.7 presents the results of the logistic regression models. When examining hard news coverage, print journalists and a publicly-traded corporate media companies were significant predictors, however- in opposite directions. Print journalists were significantly less likely to report hard news stories while journalists working in publicly-traded media companies were significantly more likely to report hard news stories. This is counter to previous literature and in the opposite direction as the proposed hypotheses. In fact, only in terms of horse-race media coverage did ownership affect news quality in the expected direction. Tweets from journalists working at publicly traded companies are more likely to contain horse-race coverage, this relationship was statistically significant at $p=.000$.

Independent journalists were more likely to have hard news coverage, focus on issues, and less horse-race coverage (however only issue frame was significant). Perhaps this is because independent journalists operate outside the commercial media market and are less susceptible to market pressures. Unexpectedly, print journalists were less likely to have hard news coverage and

more reliance on horse-race election stories- indicating a lower quality news product. However, these journalists were also more likely to rely on the issue frame in their general political news tweets.

Table 3.7: Logistic regression predicting news quality of political news tweets by news organization variables

	β	SE β	Wald's χ^2	df	p	(e ^B)
Hard News						
Print	-.271	.090	9.130	1	.003**	.762
Independent	-.181	.120	2.256	1	.436	.835
Publicly traded	.191	.072	7.109	1	.004*	1.211
Constant						
Pseudo R ² = .010						
Horse-race coverage						
Print	.180	.215	.703	1	.402	1.198
Independent	-.447	.447	1.001	1	.317	.639
Publicly traded	.601	.169	12.660	1	.000**	1.824
Constant	-2.170	.163	176.725	1	.000**	.114
Pseudo R ² = .025						
Issue Frame						
Print	.238	.108	4.855	1	.028*	1.268
Independent	.654	.144	20.586	1	.000**	1.924
Publicly traded	.093	.090	1.068	1	.301	1.097
Constant	-1.212	.085	205.128	1	.000**	.298
Pseudo R ² = .016						

Note. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. N= 3347. Reported above are the logistic regression models with the fixed effect of journalists. The fixed effect of journalists was not significant for hard news, horse-race coverage, or issue frame.

News Sharing on Twitter

Patterson (2007) argues that the organizational business model that affects traditional news content do not easily translate to the online news market. Therefore, online news should be examined with the understanding of how online news organizations generate revenue. For example,

online news organizations rely on “page views” as a way to attract advertisers. The more users viewing a webpage, the more attractive the page is for advertisers. Therefore, online news websites frequently adopt a news-aggregating role in order to generate more page views. This content sharing behavior is very different than traditional news models (Weber and Monge, 2011). Unlike traditional news models, in which the content flows from one source to consumers, online news content flows from multiples sources to other sources and finally, to the consumers. While Weber and Monge (2011) argue that news sharing is more common among news aggregators (AP, Reuters, Huffington Post, YahooNews), rather than news organizations, that produce and deliver their own content (NBC, *The New York Times*, *TIME*), this study is interested in whether the same behavior occurs in social media journalism.

News sharing is measured in two ways: retweeting political news content or by including a hyperlink to a news story. Of the 3347 political news tweets, 941 were retweets (28.1 percent of the sample). When examining the sources of the retweets, results are counter to the hypothesis. Almost fifty percent (49.4) of the political news retweets were from journalists working at a different news organization than the individual who retweeted the information. In fact, this is more than twice as many from journalists working at the same news organization (21.8 percent). Therefore, hypothesis 5 is rejected.

Yet, as hypothesis 6 suggests, the majority of retweets from opposing news organizations may be from journalists who work for news aggregating sites or who are not employed by a news organization, than from journalists working at traditional news organizations. A multinomial logistic regression²¹ was conducted in order to examine this relationship and the results were significant, χ^2 (128, $N=1204$) = 456.41, $p<.001$. Fifty-five percent of the retweets from non-traditional journalists (journalists working for blogs or independent journalists) were from journalists working at different

²¹ The model also included the fixed effects of journalist. Likelihood ratio tests for retweet user, $\chi^2(253)=436.79$, $p<.001$.

news organizations as compared to only 44 percent of the retweets of traditional journalists. Additionally, 29 percent of the traditional journalists' retweets were from the same news organization, as compared to 14.9 percent of the non-traditional journalists retweets. Hypothesis 6 is supported.

Sourcing the News on *Twitter*

Even though it is considered an important norm in reporting, sourcing material is not a frequent factor in political news tweets. In fact, only slightly more than one-fifth of the political news tweets (22.5 percent) included a quote. Journalists are more likely to include a quote in their tweet when they are live-tweeting a news event (36.8 percent of those tweets included quotes) and less likely when they are reporting breaking news (6.4 percent) or promoting one of their own stories (5.7 percent).

Additionally, news tweets about President Obama had the highest frequency of quotes (38.5 percent) while news tweets about the Supreme Court or other judicial actors had the lowest frequency of quotes (4.3 percent). This is consistent with previous research on the presidential strategy of going public (Kernell, 2007) as well as Davis' (2011) research, which demonstrates that while Supreme Court justices are appearing in the media more frequently, their appearances still significantly lag behind their congressional and presidential counterparts.

The final set of research hypotheses further examines sourcing practices in news tweets. First, H7 suggests that journalists will interact (retweeting and mentioning in their news tweets) with traditional sources on *Twitter* more frequently than non-traditional sources. Journalists retweeted traditional sources (other journalists, political actors, scholars, etc...) much more frequently than members of the general public, or unofficial sources. Only 10.9 percent of the retweets were from non-traditional sources while 89 percent were from traditional sources (70.5 percent were journalists,

10.4 were political actors, 8.1 percent were other types of traditional sources). The same trend is found when examining mentions in tweets. Less than 3 percent of all the mentions were members of the general public, or non-traditional sources. The majority of the mentions were journalists (56.2 percent) or political actors (23.3 percent). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is supported. While social media allows journalists more opportunities to engage with non-elite sources, this indicates that journalists are using social media to interact and source the same traditional sources that are found in mainstream news coverage.

The last hypothesis argues that journalists from traditional news organizations will use quotations in their tweets more frequently than journalists working for nontraditional news organizations (independent journalists and blogs). A logistic regression²² examining this relationship was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=3347) = .31, ns$. Journalists working for traditional news organizations used quotes in their news tweets 22.4 percent of the time while journalists working for blogs or independent journalists included quotes in 22.5 percent of their news tweets. Therefore, hypothesis 8 is rejected. Both traditional and nontraditional journalists included quotes in their news tweets at the same frequency.

Discussion

This study's findings add several key insights to the previous research on social media journalism.

Quality News

The most important finding is that social media journalism produces a high quality news product. A majority of the political news on *Twitter* is hard news, 54.1 percent as compared to 45.9 percent soft news content. This finding is counter to previous literature on political news coverage

²² The model also included the fixed effects of journalist. Likelihood ratio tests for using quotes, $\chi^2(53)=249.32, p<.001$.

(Prior, 2003) as well as previous literature on microblogging networks (Horan, 2012). But journalists on *Twitter* operate outside the market constraints of their traditional news organization. Therefore, while their news content in traditional media may be subject to both market pressures and organizational pressures, subsequently producing a lower quality news product (Arnold, 2004; Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008; McManus, 1994), their social media news product is unaffected. Additionally, results suggest that journalists who work for publicly-traded corporate media organizations are producing more hard news tweets. Similar trends are found when examining the prevalence of game frames as well as horse-race election coverage. While the game frame is common in political news tweets, it does not occur more frequently than an issue frame (30.3 percent as compared to 27.8 percent). And the horse-race frame is the least frequent frame in election based news tweets. Only 14.3 percent of news tweets about elections contained a horse-race frame.

It is important to recognize that these findings do not indicate that the overall quality of political news is improving. This analysis deals solely with the content on *Twitter* and does not examine the linked news stories or other social media sites. This is a significant limitation of this study. However, research shows that only a small percentage of links posted on *Twitter* are clicked. While CRTs (clicked through rates) are higher for *Twitter* than other social networking sites, they still average 7.6 percent (according to *Twitter's* self reported statistics). This means that *Twitter* users are significantly more likely to just receive the content of the news tweet than they are to read the linked news story.

The results may also be solely the product of the microblogging nature of *Twitter*. Because the site limits users to 140 characters in their tweets, journalists may be treating the tweets as news leads (also referred to as news ledes). News leads are the first paragraphs, typically no more than 30 words, of any news story and are written in order to provide readers with the basic information on a news topic (Richardson, 2006). By nature, news leads contain the “hard news facts” of any news

story. If *Twitter* simply allows journalists to only post their news leads, these results do not demonstrate any substantive changes in political reporting. But perhaps these results are indicative of something different. As Zaller (1999) argues, journalists want to put forth a quality product. “Elite reporters would like to produce a highly sophisticated news product, which in their case means a product rich in journalist interpretation and critical analysis. They want to do this because- for reasons of pay, status, peer recognition, and intellectual interest- it is more personally rewarding to do so” (Zaller, 1999, p. 24). And while market demands force journalists to produce a lower quality product in traditional news, perhaps social media provides an avenue for journalists to produce the high quality news product that actually adds to our understanding of issues, topics, elections, and candidates.

While this is becoming increasingly true of traditional news content, it is difficult to predict the same relationship between audiences and social media journalism content. Journalists may utilize the same strategies for attracting social media users as they do with traditional media. However, because social media are not an economic-dependent medium, journalists may not feel compelled to rely on the more audience-friendly news content. Additionally, individuals who use social media as a tool for news content are very different than traditional news audiences. These individuals are typically more politically informed, younger, and more politically active (Pew Research Center, 2010). Journalists may feel compelled to cater their news content to this very different audience.

Despite the limitations, as news audiences continue to receive political news from social media, these results may indicate that they are receiving hard news information at a higher frequency than soft news. It may also explain why social media journalism has a very limited audience (less than 25 percent of Americans reported receiving 2012 election news from social media, according to the Pew Research Center). If news audiences prefer soft news content, social media journalism is not producing an audience-friendly product. As a reporter for an online news organization said,

“News on *Twitter* requires a background knowledge that I do not assume a general news audience has.” Clearly, the analysis of news quality of social media journalism warrants future research.

Networked Journalism

Political journalists are using social media as a tool to connect to other political journalists rather than political actors (who still remain the primary newsmakers) and members of the public. This is in contrast to how Jarvis (2006) describes networked journalism, as “the collaborative nature of journalism now: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives.” In this study, there is little evidence that journalists are working with amateurs in their coverage of political news in social media, but rather social media is simply facilitating the interaction between political journalists. While journalists may be using humor to create engagement with their followers, they are not using the twitter-specific tools that facilitate connection to engage with their followers.

Journalists are interacting with other journalists by mentioning them in tweets, but also by retweeting their news content and linking to their news stories. This “news sharing” behavior occurs across mediums and organizations; yet the most frequent sharing comes from journalists working in either non-traditional media organizations or independent journalists.

This is consistent with previous research on beat reporting (Kaniss, 1991; Cook, 1998; Ryfe, 2009). The beat system is similar to news bureaus in that it is typically constrained by geography or newsworthiness. Journalists within an organization, are assigned to specific beats develop relationships with sources within the beat in order to simplify the news gathering process. Typically, beat reporting is described in terms of the relationship between journalists and sources. The more quickly a reporter is able to contact the important sources within a beat, the more quickly she is able to report the story. However, beat reporting also allows journalists to interact with other journalists

covering the same news beat. Having reporters embedded within a specific community or area allows them to develop relationships with fellow journalists, attend important newsworthy events for reporting, and increase their overall expertise on the subject (Kaniss, 1991).

As Ryfe (2009) explains, beat reporting is an institutional aspect of news production and help with the newsgathering process. Yet, beat reporting has allowed a “pack journalism” mentality. Coined by Crouse (1973), pack journalism is the willingness to share information across news outlets, which most certainly leads to the homogeneity of news. McManus (1994) refers to this comradery as “plagiarism news” (p. 94). Cook (1998) recalls that in an interview with a Capitol Hill broadcast network correspondent, the individual reported that how she decided what news to cover was to look at what other news sources were covering (as reported by Cook, 1998, p. 79).

Social media journalism may be increasing the prevalence of pack journalism. As journalist Greg Sargent wrote in *The Washington Post* on June 20th, 2011, during the hype of Rep. Weiner’s texting scandal: “Weinergate showcased a new kind of hyperkinetic, *Twitter*-fueled pack journalism - one grotesquely out of proportion to his sins - that made his survival impossible.”

While the implications of social media pack journalism are outside this study’s purpose, it is interesting to note that these findings on social media journalism are not consistent with the “networked journalism” theory provided by social media scholars. Social media journalism is not a product jointly constructed by journalists, sources, and audiences. Instead, journalists are using social media to interact with each other and, for the most part, the general public and political newsmakers are just observing the news construction and news sharing processes. This could also explain why journalists are not employing the *Twitter* functionalities encouraging collaboration (hashtags) as frequently as one would expect.

Media Institutions

Another important finding is that, similar to traditional news content, there are several media institutional factors that play a role in determining news quality on *Twitter*. Independent journalists, individuals who do not work for media organizations, produced the highest quality news product in the sample. These journalists were more likely to rely on the issue frame, report hard news content and less likely to include a horse-race frame in their election news tweets. Of the journalists working for media organizations, the ownership model of that news organization also matters. Journalists working for publicly traded media companies were more likely to report hard news, but also were more likely to include the horse-race frame. Surprisingly, this project also finds that print journalists did not produce a higher incentive of quality news content than their counterparts.

These results indicate that the same institutional factors that influence news content across other mediums (print, broadcast, etc...) do not clearly predict news quality on *Twitter*. Additionally, results find that as journalists strive to create their own “celebrity” and increase their number of followers, their news quality improves. Since *Twitter* is not dependent on audience ratings, perhaps journalists are reverting to a less-sensationalized, hard news form of political journalism. In addition, the news audiences on *Twitter* have higher levels of political sophistication than the general news audience. These individuals may respond better to more in-depth, issue based reporting. The concept of *Twitter* influence is discussed more in-depth in the following chapters.

Sources

Finally, results indicate that journalists are having difficulty translating some of the traditional journalistic practices onto social media journalism. In particular, social media journalists are using source quotations at a much lower rate than typically found in traditional news reporting. This is consistent with previous research indicating that the use of sources in online journalism and online

news sources are not as prevalent (Johnson and Kaye, 2007). Despite this, individual news consumers still deem quotes from sources as indication of a “credible” news item (Sundar, 1998).

How are journalists dealing with the normative practice of sourcing in their news stories in a medium that emphasizes brevity? One way journalists are dealing with these constraints is by finding additional ways to prove their credibility (Johnson and Kaye, 2004; Johnson and Kaye, 2007). Social media journalists may be employing other tools in order to be deemed “credible.” For example, the results find that a fairly high percentage (10.7 percent) of the political news tweets link to a photo of the journalist at a news event. Journalists may be using visual aids in order to seem more credible in their news reporting.

Social media journalism, on sites like *Twitter*, are an important institution in today’s media environment. Political journalists using social media are largely doing so outside the organizational constraints of traditional news organizations, while developing their own normative social media journalism practices. This leads to greater competition among journalists (even within the same news organizations) as well as more collaboration (even among journalists outside of their news organization). Despite this, previous research treated them as working within the norms that govern traditional journalism. This project answers these questions by political journalists news reporting on the popular micro-blogging site *Twitter*. This project provides an entry into understanding of political journalists’ behaviors on social media, but clearly more research is needed. By examining what *Twitter* reveals about the social networks of political reporters and how it affects the norms and routines of collecting and distributing news content, research can provide a better understanding of how changes in our current media environment are affecting journalism practices.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL MEDIA JOURNALISM: EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS, INTERCONNECTIVITY, AND NEWS SHARING OF JOURNALISTS

Our news media environment is digital, networked, and social. Journalists are “following” each other, “friending” political candidates, and “replying” to the public’s comments. This new age of social media journalism provides many opportunities for studying the interactions of journalists in a way previously unimaginable. This study seizes this opportunity using network analysis to examine the interactions of journalists on *Twitter*, a popular micro-blogging social network. Specifically, it examines two behaviors- retweeting and mentioning, in order to demonstrate the type of relationships that journalists are creating and fostering through social media. Results show that journalists are most frequently interacting with other journalists and rarely interact with members of the general public. Finally, it raises questions about the lack of diversity among influential political journalists on social media.

Introduction

“The media landscape that we knew, as familiar as it was, as easy conceptually as it was to deal with... is increasingly slipping away” (Clay Shirky, TED talk, June 2009).

The previous chapter analyzed the ways in which the norms and routines of social media are affecting the news product. The results indicated the social media news is a very different product than traditional news, focusing on different frames and being influenced by different institutional factors. This is not entirely surprising. As Shirky (2009) suggests, our media environment is going through monumental, transformative changes, and these transformations are also affecting news organizations in how they collect, produce, and disseminate news.

This chapter’s purpose is to provide further explanation of the recent transformations in the current news media landscape, drawing specific attention to journalists’ reliance on social media and its possible implications. On the outset, it is important to state that this project, which examines

political journalists, does not provide the same analysis as an examination of the news product, a published news story or broadcast, or news organization. While news organizations are also undergoing massive changes to their news production and news delivery process, they are not the focus of this project mainly because previous research has already examined how news organizations are adapting to the changing media environment (for a review see Kawamoto, 2003; Gans, 2010; Tuchman and Ostertag, 2008, Picard, 2011). Instead, this chapter limits its examination to the networks of journalists, and those they interact with, on *Twitter*.

During his February 29, 2012 *TED* talk, Reid Hoffman, founder and CEO of *LinkedIn*, argued that in “this past decade, the information age was turned into the network age” (*TED*talk, February 29, 2012). Hoffman’s argument is simple. He believes that the ease with which individuals can connect to other individuals through the Internet represents a paradigm shift in how we can, and are, using online tools. If the past decade brought us the ability to easily access information, our current digital environment is bringing us the ability to access individuals. While Hoffman does not specifically discuss the news media, his argument is especially true in terms of our current media environment. There are many recent examples of how the Internet has facilitated a networked news environment including, most notably, the Arab Spring. Using social media, individuals were able to harness the power of a network to bring down regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Additionally, Western citizens and journalists were able to follow these events using the Internet.

The very nature of social media provides tools and resources that were beyond the grasp of previous online journalists. Social media affords more information-sharing through hyperlinks (Hughes and Palen, 2009), more user-generated content (Hermida, 2010), interaction between users (Farhi, 2009), and more transparency among journalists (Hayes et al., 2007). “Networked journalism” (Jarvis, 2006) is common practice among journalists, reporters, and news editors. Brian Stelter, a *New York Times* journalist whose *Twitter* presence grew to celebrity status during his coverage of the

Joplin tornados in May 201, celebrated his 25,000 tweet with the following statement: “*Twitter* makes my work more engaging and my life more entertaining. Thanks, all of you, for following” (as posted on *Twitter*, @brianstelter, September 16, 2011). And despite the growing prowess of social media, communication researchers know very little about how journalists are using these sites. Are these journalists forming networks with members of the general public? Are these journalists forming networks with other journalists or political actors? How does information spread among these journalists?

This study provides insight into these questions using a social network analysis of 77 political journalists on *Twitter*.²³ Using network analyses, it analyzes journalists’ relationships on *Twitter*. Two different type of relationships are analyzed. The first is journalists’ “mentions.” These mentions indicate a conversation between the journalist and another *Twitter* user. By examining journalists’ mentions we can see who, and the characteristics of these individuals with whom they are interacting with most frequently. The second interaction is a “retweet.” Retweets are when journalists share another *Twitter* user’s content. There is some debate on how retweets should be classified. For the sake of simplicity, this study describes retweets as “news sharing” behaviors. Examining these news sharing behaviors provides researchers with a better understanding of how news goes viral. Both of these analyses allow us to examine the social media journalism process.

Literature Review

Social media has found extant popularity throughout various countries, populations, and networks. If *Facebook* existed as a physical country, it would represent the 3rd largest nation in the world (as reported in June, 2010) with over 400 million users. The following literature review

²³ For more information on the sampling strategy used for this analysis, please refer to the methodological section in chapter 2.

provides an introduction to social media, drawing specific attention to how journalists use social media in order to communicate with sources and interact with fellow journalists. Additionally, it explains how the social networking sites provide researchers with information to perform network analyses.

Social networking sites represent the largest technological growth since the advent of the Internet in the early 1990s. The first social networking site, SixDegrees.com began in 1997 with limited success (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). However, today's Internet environment is littered with hundreds of different social networking sites including the most popular sites like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *LinkedIn*. In fact, there are so many sites solely directed at connecting people with other individuals that in 2003, Shirky coined the term "YASNS" (Yet Another Social Networking Service) (as cited by Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Social media are defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 1). More simply, social media are about transforming monologue (one to many) communication into network communication (many to many) (Shirky, 2008).

Networks are an intrinsic part of human nature and have existed in society since there were societies (Christakis and Fowler, 2009). "These networks were ready-made to put online. We have lived in them for millions of years. Our ancestors prepared us to live in them. Networks are under our skin" (Christakis and Fowler, 2009, p. 209). Online networking sites, i.e., social media, allow individuals to move these social networks into an online platform. This increase in online interactions has made a wide variety of networks (acquaintance, co-workers, teammates) available that never existed before. The end result is a dramatic increase in the sharing of information.

Yet, most scholars have focused on the *audience effects* aspect of these changes in the media. Researchers have examined how social media are connected to political knowledge (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, and Kwak, 2005), political efficacy (Hayes, 2009), and civic engagement (Halpern and Lee, 2011), and political participation (Kwak, Williams, Wang, and Lee, 2005). Only a few research studies have examined how social media are affecting news organizations, and almost no research has looked at how journalists are using social media.

Yet, social media are having transformative effects on journalism. In a recent article on *Mashable*, social media columnist Vadim Lavrusik argues that is completely altering how we interact with media. “The future of social media in journalism will see the death of ‘social media.’ That is, all media as we know it today will become social, and feature a social component to one extent or another. After all, much of the web experience, particularly in the way we consume content, is becoming social and personalized” (Lavrusik, September 13, 2010, *Mashable.com*). Social media tools are creating citizen journalists out of everyday citizens, journalists are more embedded in communities, and news outlets are transforming their newsrooms. Perhaps one of the most stark recent changes is that bloggers are no longer seen as individuals living in parent’s basements, they are “relied upon as more credible sources” (Lavrusik, September 13, 2010, *Mashable*). In a recent editorial by Jay Rosen, a journalism professor at New York University, he argues that journalists are replacing the collective media. There is a shift in power, largely brought on by social media, and journalists are becoming more focal points in audience’s news.

Social media are also changing relationships between journalists and sources. As Cook (1998) explains, reporting has always been a collaborative juncture between journalists and sources. Sources use journalists to relay a message, deliver a counter-message, or establish a name for themselves; journalists, on the other hand, need sources in order to figure out what is newsworthy. Yet, despite the trivial nature of the relationship, sources are extremely important in determining the types of

news presented to audiences. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) acknowledge this influence when they write, “sources have a tremendous effect on mass media content” (p. 178). However, social media has seen an increase in this collaborative reporting. Journalists are also using social media as a mean of crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing allows journalists to find sources for news stories as well as verify a current story (Posetti, 2011).

Yet, skeptics are still concerned about the ability for journalists to validate stories through social media. Journalist Mark Little, of *Storyful*, writes, “without a doubt, verification is the greatest challenge. It is also the greatest opportunity for “social journalists” willing to leave the confines of traditional news organizations and perhaps even create their own” (as cited by Foremski, May 2011). But social journalists are finding ways to validate a source through *Google* maps, examining source history, and monitoring all social media sites to see if the event is being reported elsewhere. According to a 2009 Cision survey, 84 percent of journalists reported that social media sources were less reliable than traditional media. Clearly, as this relationship continues to change, better understanding of how journalists are collaborating with sources is needed.

Bimber and Davis (2003) argues that information is a universally important ingredient in the political process, and that changes in how information is created and distributed are going to change our democratic process. At the 2011 Online News Association conference in Boston, journalist for *Twitter* media Erica Anderson said, “It is not old media or new media, it is present media” (as reported on *Twitter*, @EricaAnderson). It is important that researchers start thinking of social media in terms of news, and begin to provide better understanding of its role in the current news environment.

While we know that social media allow journalists to interact with sources, other journalists, and political actors, there is another social media journalism behavior that is not as widely acknowledged: news sharing. In a recent study of online news content, Weber and Monge (2011),

found that online news sources are more likely to share content from other news sources. Unlike traditional news models, in which the content flows from one source to consumers, their study found that in the online news model, “organizations reciprocate information sharing in multiple directions” (Weber and Monge, 2011, p. 1075). However, this sharing typically consists of news aggregators (AP, Reuters, Huffington Post, YahooNews), rather than news organizations, that produce and deliver their own content (NBC, *The New York Times*, *TIME*). The content analysis section of this project supports Weber and Monge’s (2011) finding, with almost fifty percent (49.4) of the political news retweets (news sharing) from journalists working at a different news organization than the individual who retweeted the information. In fact, this is more than twice as many from journalists working at the same news organization (21.8 percent).

One of the driving forces behind the new institutionalism approach is the homogeneity hypothesis of news. This refers to the convergence of newsmaking processes across outlets subsequently resulting in similar news content. This hypothesis led both Cook (1998) and Sparrow (1999) to describe the entirety of the news media as being governed by similar institutions. Yet, as Cook (2006) explains, when it comes to news organizations- similar is not identical. Recent research has demonstrated that significant differences between organizations have effectively led to differences in the news product.

However, there are still journalistic norms that lead to homogenous news content. Beat journalism, when journalists are assigned specifically to cover a certain organization, aspect of government, or other entity, is one of these norms. Described by Crouse (1973) as “pack journalism,” the willingness to share information across news outlets most certainly leads to the homogeneity of news. McManus (1994) refers to this comradery as “plagiarism news” (p. 94). Cook (1998) recalls that in an interview with a Capitol Hill broadcast network correspondent, the individual reported

that how they decided what news to cover was to look at what other news sources were covering (as reported by Cook, 1998, p. 79).

Social media allows journalists to not only follow political actors but also fellow journalists covering the same beat. As explained earlier, one of the *Twitter*'s most practical functions is its ability to let users crowd-source the site for information. In addition, it allows users to collaborate online without being in the same physical space. It is too early to know if this news sharing behavior, popular in social media journalism, will lead to a more homogenized news product or a type of "pack journalism." However, this project provides some understanding of these behaviors among political journalists.

Twitter

Initially critics believed that social media sites, like *Twitter*, would be the end of journalism because it eliminated traditional news gatekeepers and dated distribution methods. Today, journalists and news organizations are embracing social media as an opportunity to engage with both the public and their sources in a way previously unimaginable. While the number of social media sites continues to increase, this dissertation focuses specifically on political journalists' use of *Twitter*.

Twitter has become the most popular of the social media platforms for journalists because unlike *Facebook*, most profiles are open and searchable. In fact, according to the 2011 Oriella Digital Journalism Study, 55 percent of the journalists surveyed had active *Twitter* feeds and more than 47 percent reported that they had used *Twitter* to source news leads. The report states that this "social media revolution [is] the birth of a democratic movement" and by emphasizing some of the fundamental elements of effective and purposeful journalism- transparency, honesty, and giving a voice to the powerless- it is making journalism a better and more useful tool for democracies (Oriella, *Digital Journalism Study*, 2011).

Journalists are not alone on *Twitter*. Current estimates find that there are over 175 million

Twitter accounts and at least, 100 million active *Twitter* users (as reported in *The New York Times*, September 8, 2011). A survey conducted by The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project finds that as of June 1, 2011, 13 percent of online Americans use *Twitter*. This marks a five-percentage point increase in 6 months. *Twitter* users are also very ethnically diverse. Twenty-five percent of online African Americans and 19 percent of online Hispanics use *Twitter*, as compared to only nine percent of online whites.

Twitter users are sending over 230 million tweets a day (a 110 percent increase in 9 months) and over 50 million *Twitter* users sign in everyday. It seems that *Twitter* surpasses records almost daily. During the women's World Cup Final, *Twitter* set a landmark with 7,196 tweets-per-second (as reported by Twitter). On August 28, 2011, this record was broken during MTV's video music awards. According to *Twitter*'s own site, there were over 8,868 tweets-per-second worldwide during the awards show. This is almost twice as many tweets-per-second as during the spring of 2011. In May, during the news coverage of Osama Bin Laden's death, *Twitter* reported an average of 3,000 tweets-per-second. On March 11, 2011, when Japan was struck by a tsunami and earthquake, there was an average of 5,000 tweets-per-second.

As Twitter's online presence continues to increase, it has reached a point in its universal acceptant, that it needs to be studied. As Shirky (2009) explains in a recent TED talk:

"What matters here isn't technical capital, it is social capital. These tools don't get socially interesting, until they get technologically boring. It isn't when the shiny new tools show up that their uses start permeating society, it is when everybody is able to take them for granted."

Twitter, and more importantly- political journalism on *Twitter*, is at this point in our current media landscape. Not only do political journalists have *Twitter* accounts; they use these accounts freely, unconsciously, and routinely. In addition, the routines and rules that govern the newsgathering and reporting process on *Twitter* have permeated into traditional journalistic norms

and routines; subsequently, changing the basic institutions of news reporting. While this project focuses its attention on a single social media platform, *Twitter*, it has a much broader purpose. Almost daily journalists and news organizations are confronted with significant technological changes in how they collect, investigate, and disseminate news. These changes are as varied as the conversion from analog to digital media to reporters' use of iPads, smart phones, and other forms of mobile technology. Social media represents one of these transformative changes in the news media. By examining how changes in news institutions affect news content using this specific context, this dissertation seeks to provide researchers with a better understanding of how journalism practices and news content is dependent on the technological determinants of a news environment.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

News Sharing Behaviors

There is an ongoing debate among social media scholars and journalists about news sharing behavior popular on social media sites like Twitter. News sharing is when journalists link to other news organizations' content on social media. The debate was spurred on by Elaine Clisham, a former director of the American Press Institute and led to an onslaught of discussion among journalists and media scholars. She argues that sharing of information is unprofessional and inappropriate for journalists to do in their current roles. Matt DeRienzo of the Journal Register Company wrote in his March 2nd blogpost, "Is linking a 'keystone habit' that can convert newsrooms to 'open journalism?'"

: But I wonder if the practice of linking – or reporters' and editors' failure to do so – could be far more significant than we realize in the transition to digital journalism... But I wonder if it should be moving closer to the top of our list. Maybe linking is the "keystone habit" that could be the lynchpin to creating newsrooms that are truly "digital first" (accessed at

<http://newspaperturnaround.wordpress.com/2012/03/02/is-linking-a-keystone-habit-that-can-convert-newsrooms-to-open-journalism/>).

Journalists frequently engage in retweeting on *Twitter*. It is so popular that many news organizations have issued policies regarding the “retweeting” or sharing of other news organizations’ information through social media. In November 2011, the Associated Press addressed the organization’s concern with retweeting and issued a policy instructing its reporters to be cautious about retweeting information and to make sure that it done in a way that indicates that it is simply relaying others’ information and avoiding the “appearance of bias.”

News sharing is an online phenomenon. The more users viewing a webpage, the more attractive the page is for advertisers. Therefore, online news websites frequently adopt a news-aggregating role in order to generate more page views. This content sharing behavior is very different than traditional news models (Weber and Monge, 2011). Unlike traditional news models, in which the content flows from one source to consumers, online news content flows from multiples sources to other sources and finally, to the consumers. While Weber and Monge (2011) argue that news sharing is more common among news aggregators (AP, Reuters, Huffington Post, YahooNews), rather than news organizations, that produce and deliver their own content (NBC, *The New York Times*, *TIME*).

Many journalists also view retweeting as a form of online sourcing. In an interview with a social media journalist, he said, “retweeting content is our way of sourcing the news we get via *Twitter*.” For example, if a journalist is covering a press conference and live-tweets the news event, other journalists may retweet the journalist as a way to source the breaking news story. As journalists continue to use social media as a tool to break news stories, live-report on news events, and distribute news content, this news sharing behavior will also continue.

Despite its popularity on social media, scholars know very little about the type of content that is being retweeted by journalists. The final set of research questions examines these retweets.

RQ1: What are the network characteristics of the journalists and their news retweets?

RQ2: Who are the individuals whose tweets are shared most frequently by journalists on *Twitter*?

Journalists' Interactions

One of the primary purposes of social media is the ability to connect with others. By opening avenues for conversation and reducing time and space limitations, this new medium has helped foster an era of “networked journalism.” The increase in diverse voices and openness in these social media interactions may have significant effects on news content and therefore, news audiences.

These social media behaviors are significantly different than other forms of online communication. As Goidel, Kirzinger, and Xenos (2010) argue, previous forms of communication facilitated by digital media most often occurred within the relatively friendly confines of existing networks. For example, a coworker sending political commentary he/she agrees with or find amusing to their “friends” and family through email. And while this was far more than would be possible through face-to-face communication, it did not reach beyond traditional networks. Social media significantly changed our ability to create networks outside our existing physical networks.

Benkler (2006) suggests that this networked information economy provides a nonmarket alternative to traditional news sources, allowing individual users to drive the political conversation based on what they find interesting and engaging rather than the more controlled mass media model of the broadcast era.

Yet, previous research indicates that online news has not led to an increase in voices (Farrell and Drezner, 2008; Shirky, 2003). Additionally, Hindman (2009) finds that while the Internet has increased some forms of political participation and transformed the way interest groups and candidates, organize, mobilize, and raise funds, elites still strongly shape how political material on the Web is presented and accessed. In fact, this research argues that the majority of online news is dominated by traditional news organizations.

Social media may be changing these power structures by allowing direct interaction between journalists, sources, political actors, and members of the general public. The first set of research questions and hypotheses examine the interactions of journalists on *Twitter* in order to understand these relationships, and subsequently news content and the effect on news audiences.

RQ3: What are the network characteristics of journalists and the individuals mentioned in their news tweets?

RQ4: What are the characteristics of individuals whom are mentioned most frequently by journalists on *Twitter*?

Methodology

This analysis of the interactions of political journalists on *Twitter* is limited to the same sample of individuals and time periods as described in chapter 3. For a complete description of the sampling methodology, please refer to the methodological section. The final sample consists of 77 political journalists representing 19 different news organizations. Organizational demographics as well as *Twitter* demographics (number of followers) were collected for each journalist (see Chapter Three for more information on journalists' descriptives.)

News sharing is measured using the retweet function. A **retweet** refers to a post that the journalist did not originate, indicated by the letters "RT" or "MT." Retweets were additionally

analyzed in order to determine who was the author of the original tweet and whether the journalist made a statement agreeing or disagreeing with the tweet, or if there was no statement. Original authorship was determined by performing a *Twitter* search using the handle that appears in the tweet. Retweet authorship was coded in the following categories: journalist working for the same news organization, journalists who doesn't work for the same news organization, political actor/organization, member of the general public (unofficial source), or other type of traditional source (academic, lawyer, political commentator). If retweet authorship could not be determined, it was coded as "unsure."

Interactions are measured using the "@"function. A **mention** refers to a tweet that is directed towards another user. Tweets containing mentions are typically conversations between *Twitter* users, or used in order to get an individual's attention in a tweet. Mentions are identified using the "@" character. All tweets containing a "@" were coded as mentions. These were additionally coded for the identity of the mention: journalist working for the same news organization, journalists who doesn't work for the same news organization, political actor/organization, member of the general public (unofficial source), or other type of traditional source (academic, lawyer, political commentator). It is important to note that sometimes the mention in a tweet is of the journalist composing the tweet. These typically occur in ongoing conversations between *Twitter* users. Any mention that was of the authoring journalist was coded as such. If identity of the mention could not be determined, it was coded as "unsure" and not included in the analysis.

Social Network Analysis

In order to examine the relationships between journalists and political news tweets on *Twitter*, this project relies on social network analysis (SNA). An often-overlooked methodology, SNA is the mapping and measuring of relationships between individuals, groups, companies, organization, or

any other entities. Drawing from network science, a field that focuses on patterns of connection in a wide range of both physical and social behaviors, this methodology allows researchers to dissect and analyze communication patterns and relationships and can provide unique insight into various subsets of communication research- including social media. And while Garton et al. (1997) encouraged communication scholars to explore the role of computer-supported social networks more than 15 years ago, it is only recently finding its way into communication research.

This project uses SNA in order to map the relationships between journalists on *Twitter* as well as distribution of news stories (tweets) among these journalists. Social network analysis focuses on patterns of relationships among nodes (people, organizations, states, etc) (Berkowitz, 1982; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). As Wasserman and Faust (1994) explain, the units of analyses in SNA are not the individual (known as nodes) but the relationships between the nodes. Network analysis focuses on groups of nodes either in dyads (two nodes), triads (three nodes), or in larger systems (subgroups or entire networks). While the nodes in the network are the people and groups, SNA provides both visual and mathematical analysis of the relationships or flows between the nodes (also called vertices).

Unlike most social science research methodologies, which rely on attribute data, SNA uses relational data.²⁴ Scott (2000) defines relational data as “the contacts, ties and connections, the group attachments and meetings, which relate one agent to another and so cannot be reduce to the properties of the individual agents themselves. Relations are not the properties of agents, but of systems of agents” (Scott, 2000, p. 3). In order to analyze a network, there must be identifiable relationships between people. This project uses the communications and interactions of the sample

²⁴ This project also includes attribute data in its analyses of journalists, although not necessary for network analysis, including attribute data adds insight into the SNA and subsequent visualization of networks. The attribute data of the nodes in this analysis includes their number of followers, people they follow, and their Klout score.

of political journalists on *Twitter* to analyze a particular social network: active political journalists on *Twitter*.

Each individual journalist in the sample will be considered a node/vertex and the connections between the journalists (edges). A line, or edge, will exist between two people when one “follows” the other or if one user “mentions” or “replies” to the other. Social networks are described as $G = (V, E)$, where V represents the node/ vertices and E represents the edges between the nodes. Typically, the letters n and m are used to represent the number of vertices and edges (Brandes, 2001).

There are two types of edges: directed and undirected. Directed edges imply the relationship has an identifiable direction. For example, on *Twitter* it refers to one user “replying” or “mentioning” another user. Undirected edges (symmetric edge) means that there is no obvious direction of the relationship. These two users do not engage in any interaction but are in the same network, based on mutual relationships. This project relies solely on directed edges, represented in SNA using arrows indicating which direction the relationship is. For this project, an edge is created when a journalist mentions an individual or when a journalist retweets an individual. In both of these examples, the arrow would be **from** the journalist, **to** the retweet or mention.

Measures of Centrality

This study also examines three important centrality measures in SNA. The most basic centrality measure is *degree centrality* and calculates the most important node in the network based on the number of connections that the node has (Scott, 2000). The placement of individuals within a network is one component of SNA. According to Hansen et al. (2010) the analytic technique *eigenvector centrality*, is a measure of “how important a particular individual is within a network. Important users who are paid attention to by lots of others, who are themselves paid attention to by

lots of others and so on” (p. 150). This is also known as *closeness centrality*. While it is not possible to calculate the *closeness centrality* for a node in undirected data, with directed data the *closeness or eigenvector centrality* will demonstrate which node is the most central figure in the network. While *degree* measures the number of connections, *eigenvector centrality* (x) looks at the influence of those connections to find the most influential node (West, 1996).

The final centrality measure in this study is *betweenness centrality*. This is a measure of how an individual node’s location within the network affects their access to information. As Newman (2007) explains, “betweenness is a crude measure of the control *i* exerts over the flow of information (or any other commodity) between others” (p. 6). This measure captures whether the node serves as an important mediator between two other nodes. Unlike degree and eigenvector centrality, betweenness centrality is less concerned with the vertices and instead bases its centrality measure, importance measure, on whether the vertices serve as important connectors. For example, if two journalists (A, C) never interacted with each other but were only connected through another journalist (B), if B did not exist, we would lose the connection between node A and node C and seemingly miss out on an important relationship. In this example, journalist B would have a higher betweenness centrality measure. Betweenness centrality is measured the difference between the largest individual betweenness centrality measure and the individual (*n*) betweenness centrality value. It is also a non-directional measure.²⁵

²⁵ Because the mapping of the news sharing and interactions between journalists extends beyond the bounded network of journalists included in the sample, the betweenness centrality measure is more indicative of “information centrality” than betweenness centrality (Kim and Aldrich, 2005). This centrality measure indicates important journalists who are bringing outside information into the network of journalists who would not have access to this information if it was not for that specific journalist. As Kim and Aldrich (2005) argue, without full network data, betweenness centrality should be called “information centrality.” Ideally, in order to make substantial claims about the role of these individuals within the network, we should rely on an entire, bounded network.

The data was collected and analyzed using R and the software package statnet, it is presented in sociograms (network graphs) and tables presenting centrality measures.

Results

Table 4.1 provides the descriptives and centrality measures of the sample of journalists included in this analysis. Figure 4.1 provides a graphic representation of the sample. The nodes represent the individual journalists while the edges (lines connecting the nodes) indicate that the journalists are “following” each other on *Twitter*.

Table 4.1 Centrality measures of sample

Twitter User	Eigenvector Centrality	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality
AmyEGardner	0.13	26.37	0.63
Amyewalter	0.12	41.17	0.61
AnnCompton	0.08	8.78	0.56
AnneKornblut	0.13	34.71	0.63
AriannaHuff	0.02	10.51	0.49
Aterkel	0.19	37.42	0.79
bboughtonFNC	0.04	4.10	0.52
benwerschkul	0.12	2.75	0.61
bobschieffer	0.00	0.03	0.35
BuzzFeedBen	0.13	312.12	0.62
carenohan	0.15	154.36	0.70
ChuckTodd	0.13	127.37	0.63
DanBalz	0.15	109.00	0.68
DanlothianCNN	0.18	57.84	0.75
DavidChalian	0.16	69.62	0.71
dickstevenson	0.13	53.67	0.64
DomenicoNBC	0.09	4.50	0.56
DonGonyea	0.16	60.53	0.71
donnabrazile	0.11	35.64	0.61
Drudge	0.00	0.05	0.28
EdHenryTV	0.18	277.24	0.77
EzraKlein	0.06	41.17	0.53
GregoryKorte	0.01	74.00	0.45
Hford2	0.00	0.00	0.28
HowardFineman	0.02	3.21	0.47

Table 4.1 continued

Twitter User	Eigenvector Centrality	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality
JakeTapper	0.16	265.75	0.71
jeffmason1	0.09	3.34	0.60
JeffZeleny	0.17	152.47	0.70
Jmartpolitico	0.17	129.52	0.72
JNSmall	0.17	113.40	0.74
JohnKingCNN	0.08	11.52	0.56
jonathanalter	0.04	3.13	0.50
JonathanWeisman	0.13	51.24	0.63
JonKarl	0.11	33.75	0.60
Jonward11	0.18	134.00	0.73
jpaceDC	0.02	1.09	0.48
JulieMason	0.09	28.33	0.57
KarenTravers	0.15	29.30	0.66
Kasie	0.15	52.49	0.68
KellyO	0.11	28.12	0.61
Ktumulty	0.12	124.92	0.60
Kzernike	0.02	0.23	0.46
LukeRussert	0.12	73.53	0.63
MarinCogan	0.10	5.86	0.56
MarkHalperin	0.08	19.29	0.56
markknoller	0.05	153.61	0.54
MarkThompson_DC	0.01	0.00	0.46
MichaelpFalcone	0.20	99.48	0.80
MichaelScherer	0.11	81.69	0.59
MikeAllen	0.00	150.00	0.38
MikeEmanuelFox	0.04	2.46	0.50
mmurraypolitics	0.11	33.53	0.60
NiaWaPo	0.14	51.52	0.68
NickConfessore	0.08	8.07	0.54
pbsgwen	0.11	26.49	0.59
PerryBaconJr	0.02	2.19	0.48
PeterWallsten	0.11	16.74	0.61
PhilipRucker	0.19	161.89	0.78
PostScottWilson	0.08	5.59	0.55
RichardjWolf	0.02	2.51	0.49
richardwolffedc	0.14	35.46	0.65
RickKlein	0.21	149.08	0.78
SamFeistCNN	0.08	20.93	0.55
Sandhyawp	0.06	0.40	0.54

Table 4.1 continued

Twitter User	Eigenvector Centrality	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality
SangerNYT	0.02	0.57	0.47
SavannahGuthrie	0.08	33.18	0.56
stevebruskCNN	0.19	56.38	0.77
steveholland1	0.09	69.53	0.59
SusanPage	0.16	246.05	0.70
SuzanneMalveaux	0.07	20.56	0.55
tobyzakaria	0.05	3.66	0.54
tommyxtopher	0.07	2.20	0.55
westwingreport	0.07	80.53	0.57
wgoler	0.03	0.62	0.49
YellinCNN	0.09	22.01	0.56

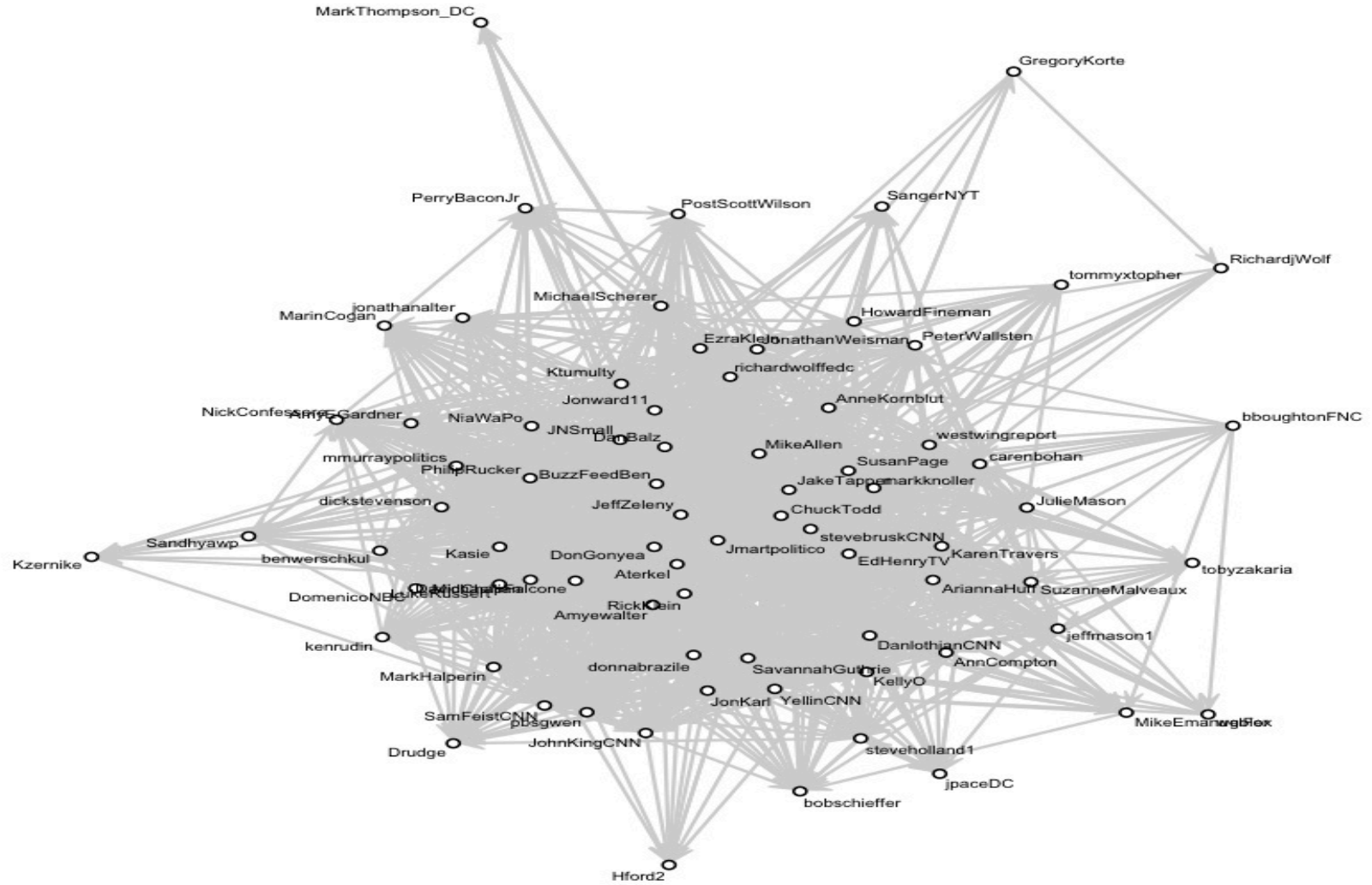


Figure 4.1 Network of sample using following characteristics.

News Sharing (Retweeting News Content) on *Twitter*

Of the 3347 political news tweets, 941 were retweets (28.1 percent of the sample). When examining the sources of the retweets, we find results counter to the hypothesis. Almost fifty percent (49.4) of the political news retweets were from journalists working at a different news organization than the individual who retweeted the information. In fact, this is more than twice as many from journalists working at the same news organization (21.8 percent).

A small majority of retweets from opposing news organization are from journalists who work for news aggregating sites or who are not employed by a news organization, rather than from journalists working at traditional news organizations. Fifty-five percent of the retweets from non-traditional journalists (journalists working for blogs or independent journalists) were from journalists working at different news organizations as compared to only 44 percent of the retweets of traditional journalists. Additionally, 29 percent of the traditional journalists' retweets were from the same news organization, as compared to 14.9 percent of the non-traditional journalists retweets.

The network of journalists and their retweets is significantly different than the network of journalists in the sample based on who is following whom. First, we compare their network density scores. The sample networked on "following" has a network density score of .366, indicating a very dense, strongly connected network. The network of journalists and the accounts they retweeted has a network density score of .023, indicating a sparse network (see Table 4.2).

There were 1202 retweets of 725 different *Twitter* users. In-degree measures provide details on the *Twitter* account most retweeted by the journalists. Of the 725 individuals who were retweeted, there were only 10 *Twitter* users who were retweeted eight or more times in the sample. These individuals are AshleyRParker, ErikaMasonhall, JakeSherman, MarcAmbinder, RealClearScott, SamSteinHP, TheFix, DaveWeigel, PeterHambyCNN, and Mediaite. All of these *Twitter* users are media actors. All of these are journalists (Mediaite is an individual who tweets on behalf of an online

news organization) working for either a traditional news organization or an online media organization. Figure 4.2 is the network map of the journalists and the *Twitter* accounts that they share news content from.

Table 4.2: Comparing network characteristics

	Network density	Edges	Vertices
Network A <i>Journalists following each other</i>	.366	2087	76
Network B <i>Journalists retweeting content from other Twitter users</i>	.023	1202	724
Network C <i>Journalists mentioning other Twitter users</i>	.0041	689	408

Eigenvector centrality scores highlight the most influential individuals in a network while betweenness centrality measures important connectors in the network. According to the analyses, Karen Travers (ABC News) is the most influential journalist based on retweets and Jonathan Martin (*Politico*) is the most important connector in the network (see Table 4.3). Karen Travers' assignment is the Washington-based correspondent for ABC NewsONE, the network's news service affiliate. She is responsible for providing both live and packaged reports for hundreds of ABC local news affiliate programs. Martin, on the other hand, is a senior political reporter for *Politico*. While both of these individuals are fixtures in the political news environment, they are not as well-known as several other journalists included in the sample. In fact, none of the senior political reporters for any broadcast, cable, or newspaper are in the top five of any of the centrality measures. Instead, news editors and online journalists hold these positions more often.

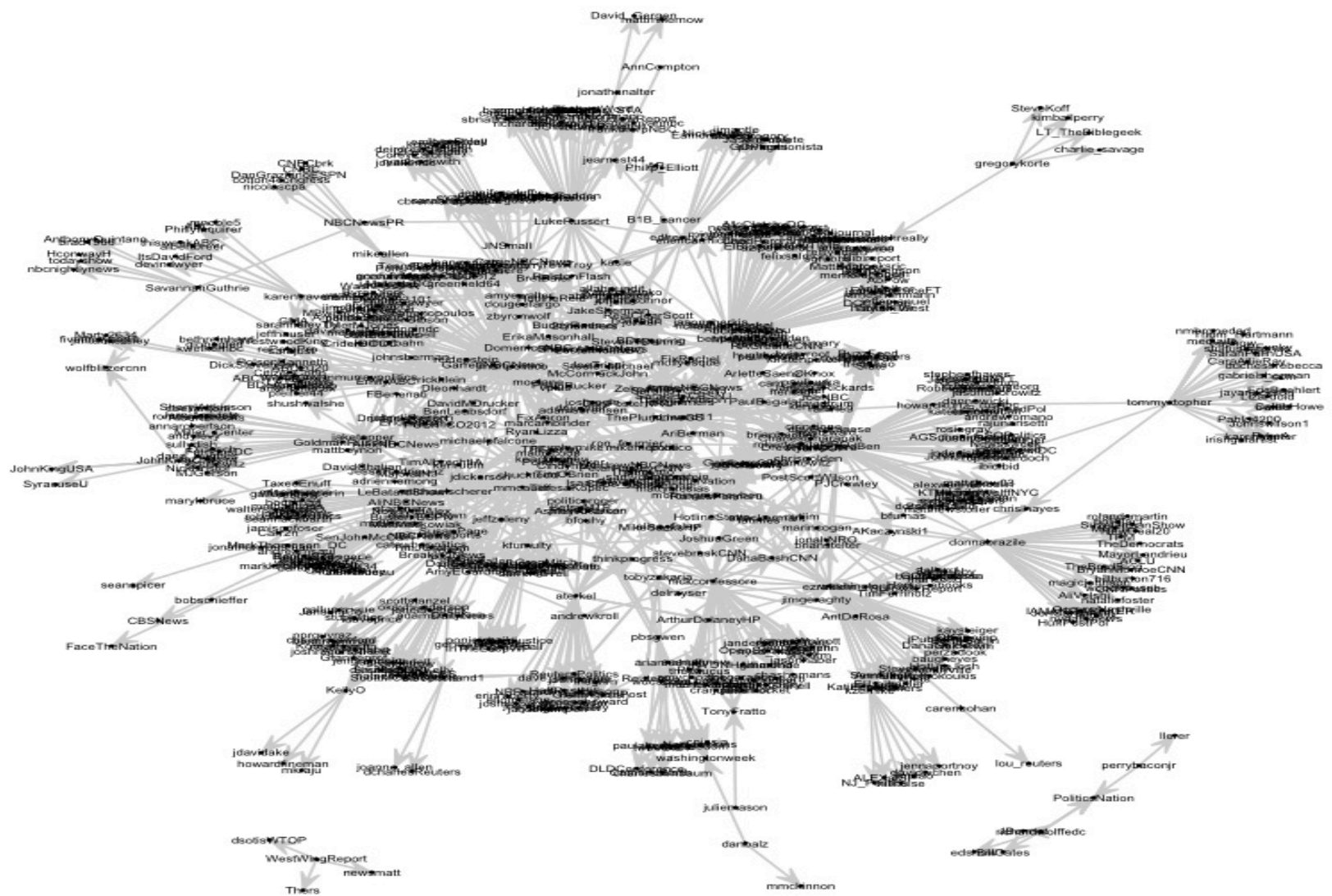


Figure 4.2 Journalists' News Sharing Behaviors

If you limit the sample to the five most influential journalists (according to their Klout scores²⁶), several trends become clear (see Figure 4.3).

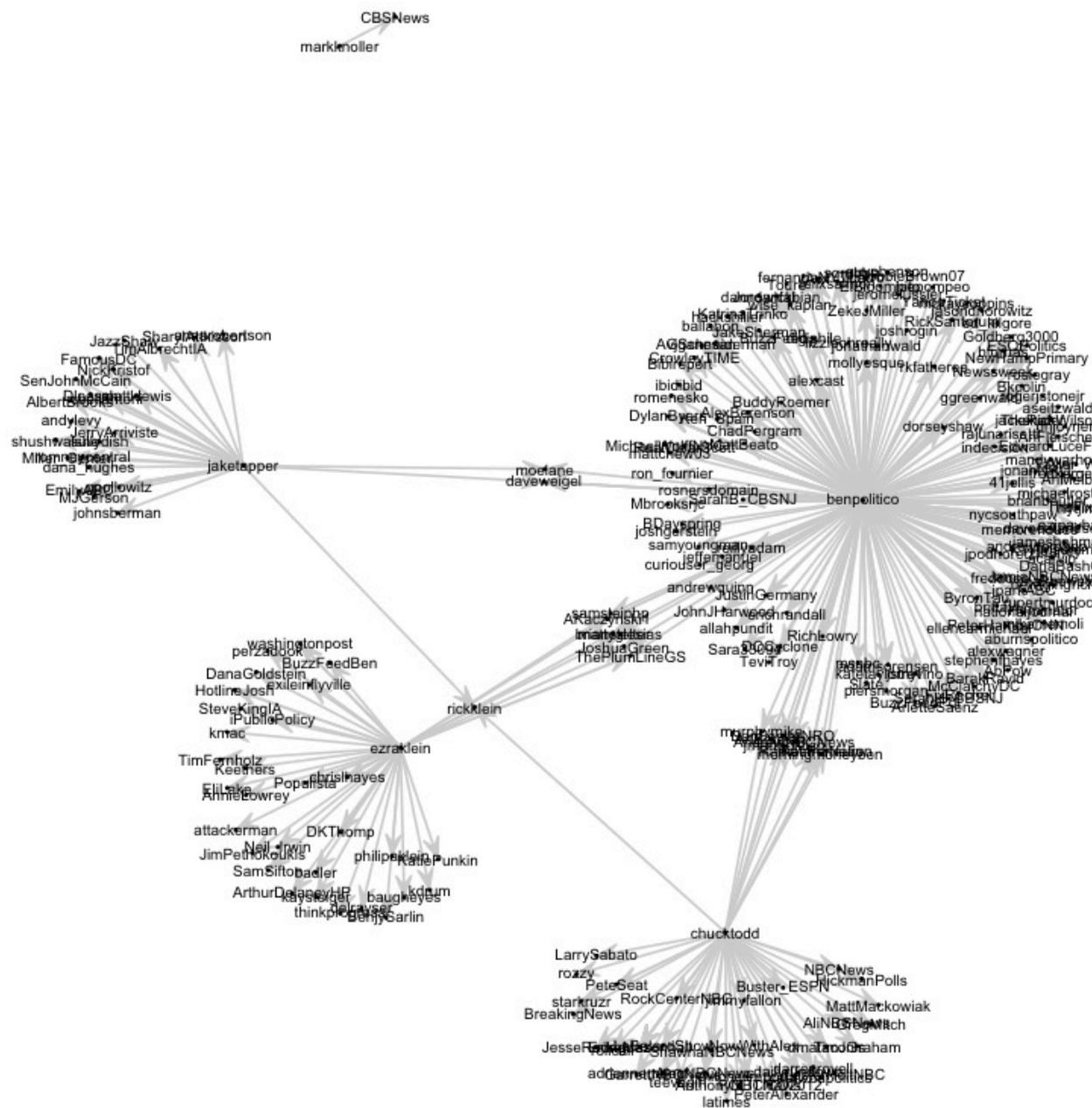


Figure 4.3 The five most influential journalists and their retweets

²⁶ For more information on Klout scores and why this project uses them as a proxy for influence, refer to the methodology section.

First, for the most part, each journalist creates their own unique network of *Twitter* users that they retweet. This is demonstrated in Figure 4.3 by the fans surrounding each of the journalist. For example, if you examine Ben Smith's network (@benpolitico) it is obvious that he retweets information from a lot of different *Twitter* users. However, only a handful of the individuals he retweets, are also retweeted by the other influential journalists in the sample. In fact, there are only fifteen individuals who were retweeted at least once by two or more of the influential journalists in the sample. Of these fifteen individuals, three were part of the sample of 77 journalists (Jmartpolitico, RickKlein, and SamSteinHP), 10 are journalists or contributors at for a media organization (AndrewNBCNews, BrianStelter, DaveWeigel, KatrinaNation, Mattyglesias, MorningmoneyBen, ThePlumLineGS, RamesPonnuru, DanFosterNRO, and AKaczynski1), and one is a conservative blogger (Moelane). There were no individuals who were retweeted more than twice by more than one of the journalists. Clearly, when an influential journalist shares news from other *Twitter* users, they are not doing so from people outside of mainstream news outlets.

Journalists' Interactions on *Twitter*

The results indicate that journalists use *Twitter* as a way to interact with other journalists. The majority of the mentions ($n= 689$) were other journalists. Fifty-six percent of the mentions were journalists (27.9 percent were journalists working at the same news organization as the journalist who tweeted and 28.3 percent were journalists working at different news organizations). Only 23.3 percent of the mentions were of political actors or political organizations. Yet, this is still considerably more than the number of mentions who are members of the general public and considered unofficial sources. Only 2.3 percent of the mentions were categorized as "general public." Some scholars argue that this type of media allows for more input from members of the general public, however, the previous chapter casts significant doubt into this theory. Those results suggest

that journalists are not using social media as a way to connect to political actors or members of the public, but rather as a tool to connect with other journalists. Despite this, some journalists claim that one of their favorite aspects of social media is the ability to interact with audiences. As a broadcast journalist stated, “I use social media to engage with my viewers.”

If you examine the network characteristics of the journalists and their mentions, several trends appear (see Figure 4.4). First, several fan networks are in the overall network map. These fans indicate that a journalist in the sample is mentioning several *Twitter* users that no other journalist is also mentioning. For example, there are 689 total mentions in the sample (edges) among 408 different *Twitter* users (vertices).

There were six *Twitter* accounts that were mentioned 10 or more times in the sample. These were abc (10 mentions), dailyrundown (10), jaketapper (11), wolfblitzercnn (14), speakerboehner (17), and mittromney (27).

If you examine the betweenness values of the *Twitter* users in the sample (see Table 4.3), there were 10 that had a betweenness score higher than 80 (indicating they are important distributors of information). And while there were not any members of the general public who were mentioned frequently in the journalists’ tweets, several political actors had high degree centrality measures. This is considerably different than the network analysis of journalists’ retweets. Journalists are more likely to mention a political actor in their tweet than they are to retweet information from that individual.

Table 4.3: Network characteristics of Journalists and Retweets

Betweenness Centrality	Indegree	Degree Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
Jonathan Martin (3612.9)	Mediaite (20)	Ben Smith (206)	Karen Travers (.50)
Ben Smith (3029.1)	Dave Weigel (13)	Jon Ward (115)	Michael Scherer (.34)
Rick Klein (2909.5)	Peter Hamby (13)	Jonathan Martin (102)	Rick Klein (.34)
Jon Ward (2008.8)	Sam Stein (10)	Michael Scherer (77)	Amy Walter (.32)
Jake Tapper (1649.5)	TheFix (10)	Rick Klein (57)	Chuck Todd (.32)
Chuck Todd (1502.5)	Ashley Parker (8)	Nick Confessore (56)	Ben Smith (.26)
Philip Rucker (1401.8)	Erika Masonhall (8)	Chuck Todd (56)	Michael Falcone (.26)
Amy Walter (1218.9)	Jake Sherman (8)	TommyXtopher (48)	Jonathan Martin (.23)
Luke Russert (730)	Marc Ambinder (8)	Amanda Terkel (42)	Don Gonyea (.19)
Jeff Zeleny (358)	RealClearScott (8)	Ezra Klein (42)	Jake Tapper (.19)
Mark Murray (355)	2Chambers (7)	Don Gonyea (40)	Mark Murray (.12)

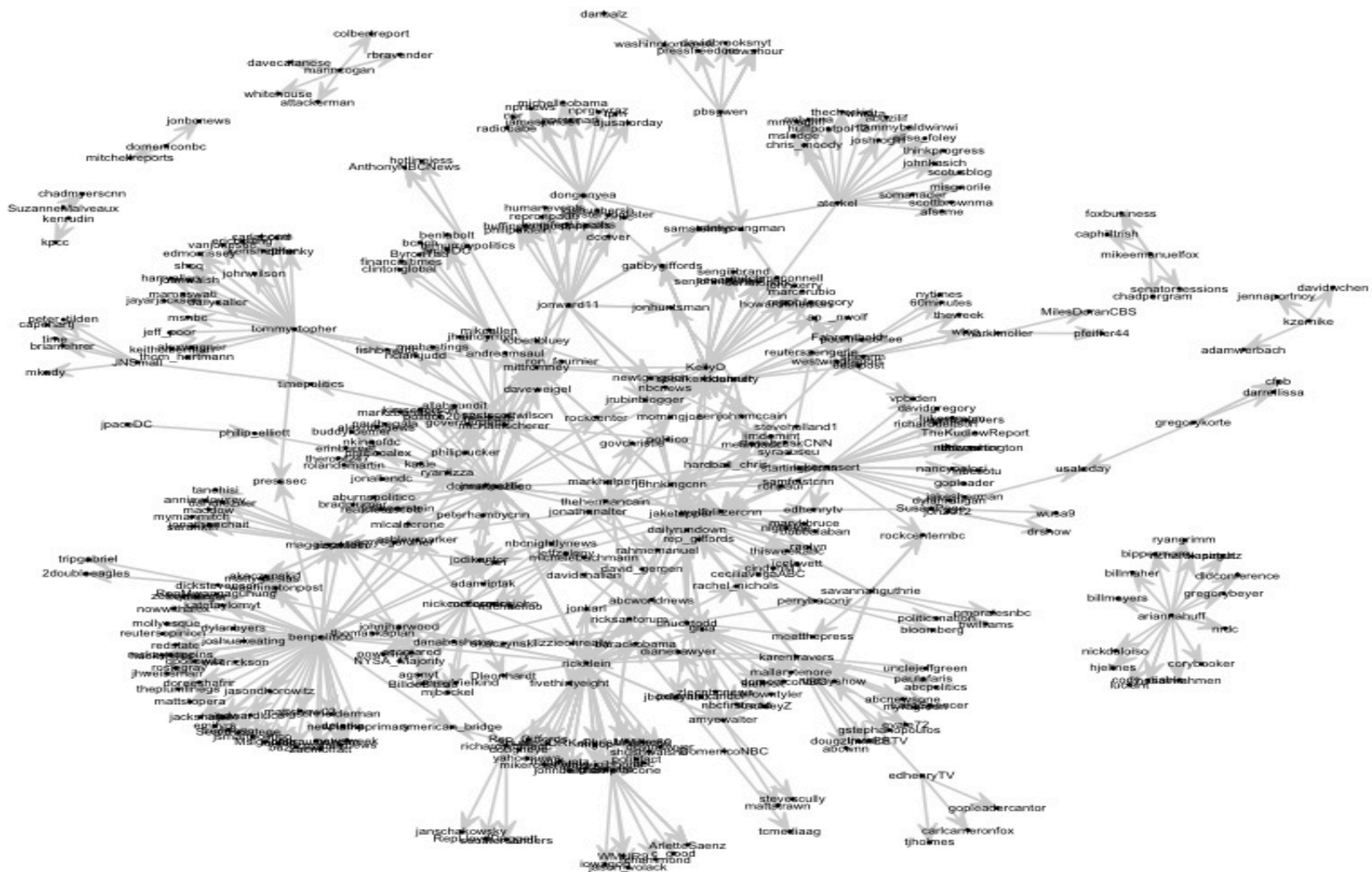


Figure 4.4 Journalists' and Mentions on *Twitter*

Finally, the eigenvector centrality measures demonstrate that three out of the five most important journalists in this network work for ABC (Rick Klein, Karen Travers, Jake Tapper). This demonstrates that ABC journalists are mentioning other ABC journalists most frequently in their tweets, building stronger, more interconnected networks. This is consistent with the Pew Research's (2011) analysis of mainstream news outlets' use of *Twitter*. ABC News has the most active *Twitter* feeds (15) and averages 191 tweets per day. This is significantly higher than both NBC and CBS broadcast companies. However, this is considerably fewer than most newspapers and cable news television stations. For example, both CNN and *The Washington Post* have over 70 different active *Twitter* accounts associated with the media company. In an interview with an ABC journalist, the individual reported, "*Twitter* is very important to my news reporting." Perhaps these results are indicative of a different type of culture at ABC, and a more concerted effort to embrace social media.

Table 4.4 Network characteristics of Journalists and Mentions

Betweenness Centrality	Indegree	Degree Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality
Rick Klein (1328.78)	Mitt Romney (27)	Ben Smith (75)	Rick Klein (.74)
Jake Tapper (1177.98)	John Boehner (17)	Rick Klein (68)	Jonathan Martin (.74)
Ben Smith (625.43)	Wolf Blitzer (14)	Jake Tapper (40)	Karen Travers (.31)
Jonathan Martin (592.42)	Gabrielle Giffords (13)	Jonathan Martin (39)	Jake Tapper (.23)
Karen Travers (293)	Jake Tapper (11)	TommyXTopher (37)	Mark Halperin (.14)
Chuck Todd (210.56)	Zeke Miller (9)	Luke Russert (37)	Karen Tumulty (.14)
WestWingReport (196)	Frank Luntz (9)	Kelly O'Donnell (36)	Ben Smith (.14)
EzraKlein (146)	FishbowlDC (9)	Chuck Todd (31)	Amy Walter (.09)
AmyEWalter (142)	Diane Sawyer (8)	Mitt Romney (27)	WestWingReport (.07)
Michael Scherer (132.83)	Herman Cain (7)	Jon Ward (23)	Jon Karl (.07)
Mike Allen (84)	Newt Gingrich (7)	John King (22)	Chuck Todd (.07)

Once again, if the analysis is limited to the five most influential journalists (using Klout analytics), we can further examine how journalists are interacting with *Twitter* users. As seen in Figure 4.5, these journalists mention fewer *Twitter* users than they retweet. For example, Mark Knoller of CBS News only mentions three individuals in his entire sample of tweets. These three individuals are also not connected to any of the four journalists. Of his three mentions, two are journalists (MilesOBrienCBS and WestWingReport), and the other one is DanPfeiffer, who works in the White House Communication Office. Clearly, Knoller is not using *Twitter* as a way to interact with individuals who are not traditional political communication actors. Another interesting aspect of the network in Figure 4.5 is that two individuals are mentioned by at least three of the journalists examined (JodiKantor and AKaczynski1). Jodi Kantor is a writer who recently published a book on the Obama family while Andrew Kaczynski is a reporter for BuzzFeed Politics. No other individuals were mentioned by more than two of the journalists.

Discussion

“I think (*Twitter*) has decreased my reliance on the AP, for one. It has also probably hurt people’s attention span. It’s tough to get someone to read a 2,000-word story, for example. What gets “Retweeted” is usually fairly superficial and pithy. *Twitter* is also a pretty mean place. People are pretty nasty when they feel like they are just sending things out into the ether. When you have a situation when everyone’s trying to be more clever than the next, it is a problem. I also think it probably has taken time away from real reporting. It is all about what you want to get out of it. The problem becomes when what you want out of it is fame, then you’re likely going to have problems. And vanity is something that needs to be checked. Even I sit there and pay attention to how many followers I have and why this person or that has more than me. That is not a good thing” (in-depth interview, broadcast journalist, February 13, 2012).

This comment, from an in-depth interview with a journalist working for a broadcast media company, is just one example of the relationship journalists have with social media. This journalist is fairly ambivalent about the instantaneous feedback he receives from *Twitter*. Other journalists enjoy the instantaneous nature of *Twitter*. They are using the medium to connect to other journalists, share news content with each other, and in many cases- increase their name recognition or “celebrity.” While the journalist quoted above is cautious about the fame-seeking behaviors occurring among journalists on social media, the data supports that this is a common trend. As Holton and Lewis (2011) explain, because *Twitter* is increasing in its popularity as a news sharing platform and its ability to create an “ambient” journalism (Hermida, 2010), it is increasingly important to study it as a reporting mechanism. And despite its dominant role in today’s media environment, researchers know very little about the interactions occurring among journalists on social media. The most important contribution of this study is the initial analysis of journalists’ online networks through an examination of their *Twitter* use.

Journalists’ Interactions and News Sharing

Journalists use *Twitter* to follow other journalists, interact with other journalists, share content from other journalists, and rarely use it to engage with audiences. This is counter to previous

theoretical research on the use of social media among journalists and news organization. For example, Baym (2010) suggests that *Twitter* encourages “weak ties,” providing users with a chance to interact with news organizations and subsequently become interactive news audiences. This research does not support this argument. The majority of the retweets and interactions of journalists are on *Twitter* are among journalists or, less frequently, with political actors. In fact, fewer than 5 percent of the retweets in the sample are from members of the general public. Media companies and other elite journalists (like Dave Weigel) are the most frequently retweeted *Twitter* accounts among the journalists in the sample. The interactions are slightly more diverse with national political actors included in the most mentioned *Twitter* accounts. More research is clearly needed on determining whether this interaction is one-sided or actually leads to an online dialogue between journalist and political actor.

Despite increasing restrictions enforced by news organization, journalists are frequently using *Twitter* to share information for other news organizations and competing journalists. Java et al. (2007) and Marwick and boyd (2011) argue that *Twitter* is used primarily for four reasons: daily chatter, conversation, sharing information, and reporting the news. In an extension of these studies, Lasorsa et al. (2011) found that journalists working for traditional media organizations were less inclined to share news content from other news organizations. They were less likely to “relinquish their gatekeeping role” (Lasorsa et al., 2011, p. 1). This study supports this finding but adds to it by providing information on who is being retweeted and retweeting most often. Less well-known journalists are retweeting more often and are retweeting content from lesser-known journalists. This may be as an attempt to increase their name recognition among audiences, or perhaps is simply a measure of what work journalists find valuable and informative. Since news on *Twitter* is more policy-oriented than traditional news (see chapter 3), journalists may value a different news product than news audiences and use *Twitter* as a vehicle to distribute this higher quality news product.

It is important to note that journalists (within the sample) are interacting with a vast network of other *Twitter* users in both their retweeting and mentioning behaviors. While these results may suggest a diverse and varied news product, it also results in hundreds of weak ties between the journalists and the users they interact with. These types of connections may also influence the centrality measures. For example, because betweenness centrality is a measure of how important that individual (node) is in connecting with other nodes in the network, betweenness centrality scores (in the retweet and mention networks) may be inflated based on the number of connections (retweets or mentions) the journalist has in the sample. But the *Twitter* networks examined in this analysis are not simply indicative of relationships, but also of “networked journalism.” When *Politico*’s Jonathan Martin retweets a news item from another *Twitter* user, he is not just creating an edge between himself and that user (as displayed in the network graph). He is also distributing that content to all of his followers, including the other journalists in the sample who follow him. Each clique, a subgroup of nodes connected to one journalist and no others in the sample (Luce and Perry, 1949), is contributing to the news content on *Twitter*. This is consistent with Granovetter’s theory, “strength of weak ties,” which proposes that “access to new information...comes into strongly connected groups through [nodes] with external connections, which are likely to be weak” (as explained by Hawe, Webster, and Shiell, 2004). In these instances, betweenness centrality scores serve as a proxy measure of individuals within the network who bring in the most “outside” information. And for networked journalism, this is a very important quality.

Diversity among political journalists

Another interesting finding is who journalists are interacting with most frequently. While the sample included journalists from different ethnic backgrounds, from various news organizations, and female journalists- the most influential journalists in both analyses were predominantly white

males.²⁷ This is consistent with previous research. Several studies have performed surveys of journalists in order to explain the gender disparity among journalists (see Gallagher, 1995; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Delano and Henningham, 1995). And women have gradually gained in certain media roles, men continue to dominate both senior level management positions and elite beats, like the national political beat. Weaver et al. (2003) found that despite an increase in female graduates from journalism schools, less than one-third of all full-time journalists in the American mainstream media are women. The same is true among black journalists. None of the journalists ranked in the top 15 percent of any of the influence measures are black (as determined by looking at biographical information of the journalists). Obviously, more research is needed in this area.

Literature on media diversity demonstrates that there is a lack of black journalists in mainstream media's newsrooms. According to the National Association of Black Journalists, black journalists only hold 12 percent of American newsroom positions. Cottman and Jones (2008) argue that this is the result of poor recruiting and retaining of black journalists by mainstream media. And increases in the diversity of media organization and medium are not increasing the number of black and female journalists. In fact, while online political journalists are increasing their influence among other political journalists- these individuals are predominantly white and male.

The lack of diversity in the results is problematic for several reasons. First, the lack of diversity may limit the lack of minority sources in the media and as Cook (1998) suggests, news sources are extremely influential in shaping news agendas. Previous research also overwhelming argues that exposure to more diverse viewpoints is important for democracy and leads to a more informed citizenry. We know that individuals are not as likely to self-expose to diverse viewpoints as they are to expose themselves to media, which can provide this type of diversity (Mutz, 2001). If one of the purposes of *Twitter* is to increase diversity in the media, more black and female journalists are

²⁷ The notable exception is Karen Travers. She has the highest eigenvector centrality score in the network analysis of journalists' and their retweets.

needed among the influential political journalists on the site.

Secondly, research shows that minorities rely on social media at a higher rate than whites. As previously mentioned, 25 percent of online African Americans and 19 percent of online Hispanics use *Twitter*, as compared to only nine percent of online whites. As this medium becomes a better avenue to reach minority audiences (previous research indicates that fewer minorities watch public affairs television and read the newspaper than white audiences, see Poindexter, 1981) for political news and information, it is important that there is increased diversity among the journalists and reporters on *Twitter*.

Exponential Random Graph (p^*) Models

The next step in this project is to use exponential random graph models to examine what characteristics of journalists and other *Twitter* users explain their popularity or influence on *Twitter*. As Shumate and Palazzolo (2010) explain in their review article on the use of social network analyses in communication research, until recently, researchers were very limited in their analysis of networks. Most of these analyses were limited to descriptive explanations and the visual mapping of networks. While these studies still added to our understanding of communication networks, the researchers were unable to perform any significance testing (predictions) of the networks using node attributes. Exponential random graph models (ERGMs) are able to include node attributes into SNA, thereby providing the ability to study the predictability of a network based on node attributes (for a complete review of ERGMs, see Robins and Morris, 2007).

ERGMs allow researchers to “examine the prevalence of the network structures above what would occur by chance alone” (Shumate and Palazzolo, 2010, p. 347). For example, in this study we could examine if there any characteristics of journalist that help predict the likelihood of them being followed by other journalists. Or by gathering attribute data on all the *Twitter* users who were

retweeted or mentioned by the journalist, we could explore if there are any demographic characteristics or *Twitter*-specific characteristics that can predict the likelihood of an individual being retweeted. This is clearly the next step for this research.

This study is limited by its sampling methodology. In network analysis, it is ideal to analyze an entire network because it allows you to make important claims about influences on that network. This analysis is confined to a small sample of journalists who cover the national political beat. Ideally, the analysis would include every journalist who covers this beat. Unfortunately, because there is no way to access the population, the researcher is limited to sampling, as the most appropriate methodology for gathering a generalizable sample. Future research, with complete networks, will help researchers better understand the predictors of journalists' interactions and news sharing behaviors.

Despite these limitations, this research provides unique insight into the networks of political journalists on *Twitter*. An increase in networked journalism has led to substantial changes in the current news media environment. It is important to clarify that networked journalism is not citizen journalism (Gillmor, 2004). Rather than allowing members of the general public to be involved in the development of news, networked journalism is the changing of the news process from a linear relationship to one that is a networked process- with constant communication and interactions. As Jarvis (2006) explains, networked journalism allows journalists to cross "boundaries" in order to share information. These results support this by demonstrating how frequently journalists engage in news sharing across news organizations and mediums. Beckett and Mansell (2008) argue that networked journalism will also greater heterogeneity and diversity in the news process. This research suggests that this is not currently occurring among political journalists on *Twitter*. While lesser known journalists have higher status levels in social media than they do in traditional media, the vast majority of these individuals are not minorities. By continuing to analyze these networks on social

media sites, researchers will have better understanding of the construction process of social media news.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL MEDIA: THE INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT NEWS INSTITUTION

This study examines social media journalism in the current media environment. The project adds three significant contributions to the political communication research paradigm. First, it provides an in-depth analysis of the normative practices of political journalism on *Twitter*. This allows researchers to better understand what type of news, audiences are getting through social media as well as how journalists are using this medium in their newsgathering and reporting processes.

Secondly, this project aimed at establishing a better methodology for studying social media journalism. One of the most difficult aspects of this project was developing a cohesive, systematic, and scientific methodology for collecting a random sample of tweets from social media sources. And then, once the sample was collected, applying previously established coding schemes as well as developing new coding schemes to accurately measure the data collected.

Finally, it applies social network analysis, an advanced methodological tool, in order to better understand previously unexamined networks. Networking has always been an important tool for journalists. Building and maintaining social networks is not novel; journalists need to interact with fellow journalists, sources, and news audiences in order to be successful news reporters. However, researchers have not been able to systematically analyze these networks. Social media provides researchers with the necessary data to study these networks. This study is the first attempt at analyzing the interactions between journalists, sources, and news audiences.

The following section provides an overview of these contributions and then discusses both the limitations of this project as well as what is next for this research. As explained in the methodological section (see Chapter 2), I also conducted interviews with political journalists about their use of *Twitter* and how they view the use of social media in the reporting of political news. Throughout the dissertation, I have referenced these interviews intermittently to provide further

insight in the data analysis. This chapter relies heavily on data collected during the interviews to add more nuance to the major findings of this project.

Studying Social Media as News Institutions

News institutionalism provides an important theoretical framework for understanding how organizational processes affect news content. I draw from this significant body of literature and add the following notion: social media are news institutions and should be examined through an institutional lens. Cook (1998) argues that news institutions are unique because they fit into three specific criteria: there must be formal and informal structures that constrain individual choice, they must extend over time, and they must preside over a social sphere. Social media fit all three of the criterion. Yet, this project is not advocating for simply including social media into our traditional understanding of news institutions. In fact, this project's results indicate that social media are not just another type of news institution, relying on the same organizational practices as broadcast or print. They have their own unique institutional norms and routines, and also are influenced by their own organizational determinants of news content. I argue by using the institutional framework, researchers can better understand the social media for what they are, news institutions.

Using a new institutional lens, researchers have demonstrated that the hierarchical structure of a news organization can determine significant aspects of the news content. For example, news organizations that are part of a corporately owned, publicly traded company, tend to produce a product that contains more soft news and entertainment-focused content, rather than policy information. This is because owners who are more concerned with profit than serving public interest will produce a very different news product than media owners whose primary goal is to inform the public on important public affairs (Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008; Bovitz et al., 2002; Schaffner and Sellers, 2003). However, social media journalism functions largely outside of the

traditional hierarchical structure of media organizations. The results of this study indicate that because journalists are not constrained by the traditional format (whether it be print journalists confined to a certain word count or journalists working for a large conglomerate concerned with maximizing audience shares) in their reporting on social media, the product is quite different. First, while the majority of journalists are still working for mainstream media companies, their social media behaviors (interactions with others as well as the content they distribute) are not dependent on their media company. For example, journalists share news from journalists working at competing news organizations. Additionally, ownership models do not constrain news quality on social media. In fact, journalists working for corporate owned, publicly traded companies are producing a higher quality news product than their counterparts.

It is important to point out that this behavior and news product is currently occurring alongside their “traditional reporting.” While there may be some interaction effects (i.e., print journalists who tweet more during breaking news events because they are not easily able to update the content on their traditional medium), the majority of social media journalism operates as a tangential extension of their traditional reporting. That does not mean it is not having an effect. For example, the 2012 Pulitzer Prize committee rewarded Alabama’s *The Tuscaloosa News* for their tweeting in the aftermath of a tornado. While it is not the “Pulitzer Prize for Tweeting” (Poynter, 2012) it does show how social media journalism can enhance other forms of journalism. In today’s media market, social media journalism is an extension of more mainstream journalism; but that does not mean it will not be a stand-alone medium in the future.

Recent developments in the news media have led to uncertainty about both news organizations and the sustainability and traditional news mediums. A traditional new institutional approach to studying organizations typically doesn’t allow for changes in the rules. In our current media environment, researchers are struggling with an appropriate way to understand how these

changes fit into our understanding of both news construction and news content. For example, five years ago scholars were hesitant to include online news content in their analyses, and now the reality is that most studies not only need to include online content from traditional news sources but also from blogs and social networking sites (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005). In fact, according to a 2012 Pew Research Center study, more Americans are going online for news (40 percent) than they are reading newspapers (20 percent). While social media are not yet major drivers of news, (only 9 percent of Americans say that they received news through social media, Pew, 2012) they have the potential to become important players in news distribution. How researchers study these increasingly important news institutions will determine how well researchers can explain the overall media environment.

Project Contributions

Social Media News

The most important contribution of this dissertation project is its insight into both the norms and routines of political journalists on *Twitter* as well as an examination of the content of political news on *Twitter*. While political journalists post and share content more frequently during important political news events (e.g. President Obama's State of the Union address), they have also incorporated *Twitter* in their routine news reporting with the majority of the tweets categorized as routine reporting ($n = 950$). Interestingly, non-online journalists produced many more tweets during event-driven coverage. This may be a result of medium-specific demands. Because online journalists are not controlled by the same time and space constraints as traditional journalists, they do not use *Twitter* as the medium for "overflow" coverage like traditional journalists do.

In addition to routine news reporting and live-tweeting news, journalists also use *Twitter* in order to be funny. This was a point emphasized during the in-depth interviews. Several journalists

commented that they use *Twitter* to provide color commentary in a way that traditional journalism does not allow. This is consistent with Holton and Lewis (2011) who argue that humor is often used by journalists on *Twitter* as a way to connect with audiences. If this is true, this may be the only indication of journalists' interaction with audiences in the entire study. However, while journalists readily admit to using humor in their tweets, they do it as a way to create prestige among fellow journalists. It is a source of pride for the journalists- they want to be considered "funny." This was a common theme in all of the interviews. As one journalist explained:

"I think that some journalists use *Twitter* as a way to vent. Josh Green, for example, who is a journalist at Bloomberg Business Week, is the funniest tweeters out there. I think Josh uses *Twitter*, I mean you can't write what he writes on *Twitter* in Business Week."

Another way that the routines of traditional journalism do not translate to social media journalism is sourcing. This study finds that journalists are having difficulty sourcing information in their news tweets. In fact, journalists on *Twitter* use source quotations at a much lower rate than typically found in traditional news reporting. While this is consistent with previous research indicating that the use of sources in online journalism and online news sources are not as prevalent, it challenges the norms of journalism. While journalists bring more to a story than a collection of sources, the broader authority of the story resides in the source. If the journalist wants to say something than they must find a source to say it for them (Trumbo, 1996). Berkowitz and Beach (1993) argue the journalist-source relationship is a struggle for determining meanings. The lack of sourcing in news tweets may indicate a lessening in the power of this relationship. Perhaps sources are no longer having the same effect on a news story as in previous mediums. Or perhaps this is just a proxy measure for the brevity required in news tweets and the sourcing of information is still very prevalent in linked news stories.

Another reason why the results show a decline in sourcing may be that sourcing is done differently on social media. Instead of using quotes to source a material, journalists may rely on the

retweet function as a way to “source information.” For example, Ben Smith (former reporter for *Politico* and current editor of *BuzzFeed Politics*) treats his *Twitter* feed as a place to curate information. If you examine his *Twitter* feed, you can see a constant stack of various avatar images as he retweets, relinks, comments, shares, pushes out information from a variety of different individuals and news organizations. As one interviewee stated, “Retweeting is sourcing information.”

In addition, other journalists find it very difficult to use quotes in the tweets because they are typically tweeting away from their news desks and therefore, may not have the exact wording in front of them. “It is a little stressful [to use direct quotes in tweets] and I won’t do it unless I have the exact wording or I will just use a colon to indicate that it is coming from the source but may not be the exact wording. For example, I may write Santorum: but then no quotes.” So tweets may be including sourced material, but not using the traditional quotations marks found in mainstream news reporting. Future research in this area should take this into consideration and create a coding scheme to capture this form of social media sourcing.

Beyond the changing norms and routines, this project also examines news content on *Twitter*. One of the most important findings of the content analysis is that social media journalism produces a high quality news product. A majority of the political news on *Twitter* is hard news, 54.1 percent as compared to 45.9 percent soft news content. This finding is counter to previous literature on political news coverage (Prior, 2003) as well as previous literature on micro-blogging networks (Horan, 2012). Yet, considering the research suggesting that market pressures and organizational pressures are the strongest determinants of lower quality news products (Arnold, 2004; Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008; McManus, 1994), the increased quality of news on social media sites (which are outside of the market constraints of traditional news distribution) is explained. Additionally, results suggest that journalists who work for publicly traded corporate media organizations are

producing more hard news tweets. Similar trends are found when examining the prevalence of game frames as well as horse-race election coverage.

The quality of news found on *Twitter* may also be directly related to its “real” purpose, or at least the reason why journalists use it- as a news wire. Many of the interviewees said that even when they do not tweet, they use *Twitter* to get the most up-to-date news. As one political editor explained, “*Twitter* is the new Associated Press.” If journalists are using *Twitter* as a news wire service, it makes sense that it is of a higher news quality than print, broadcast, or even online news. The journalists just want the facts, they do not want the fluff. This point is best explained from an interview with a journalist for an online news organization:

“The real value in the news business today is speed and brevity. As peoples’ attention spans, well, as the transmission of news has sped up, the attention span of the average reader has gone down. You no longer have time to take in an article, because as you do, there is already something else that has been added to it. The ability to call from a variety of different perspectives and sources at once to get the big picture is what most people are looking for. The genius of *Twitter* is actually setting limits and I say that for a couple reasons. Number one, people don’t have the attention spans that they used to. But number two, in order to compete with somebody who is providing an in-depth look at anything that has happened, you need to write something just as long. That’s intimidating, why bother, it is a lot of work. You can’t find the time in your day to do that. But to put something in 140 characters, places everyone on even footing and makes it possible to disseminate instant analysis.”

While there is little argument over the notion that social media are changing news reporting, very little is known about the actual changes occurring. This research fills this gap by examining a sample of political news coverage on the social networking site, *Twitter*. Drawing on previous research about the organizational determinants of news as well as the unique characteristics of social media, it provides researchers with important insight into social media journalism.

Establishing Methodology

As discussed in the methodological chapter, one of the biggest hurdles in examining social media journalism is the lack of previously established methodologies. The first problem is generating

a sample of journalists on *Twitter*. Previous researchers have attempted to collect a purposive sample by focusing their research on the “most followed” journalists (Lasorsa et al., 2011; Holton and Lewis, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2011). While this provides a sample, it is definitely not a random sample of journalists but rather focuses on a certain type of journalist who generates a lot of followers. Additionally, Avnit (2009) suggests that there is a “million follower fallacy” and argues that a significant number of followers on social media is not a sufficient measure of influence. This project generates the study’s sample by identifying a population of journalists and finding all of the individuals who are active on *Twitter*. I argue that this is a more effective strategy for identifying a sample for a couple reasons.

First, a journalist’s number of followers has no bearing on whether they are included in the sample. Secondly, it focuses the research on actual journalists rather than computer-generated media organization accounts. Every media organization has multiple accounts that generate tweets using the *Twitter* feeds of their journalists as well as blog posts, news broadcasts, and online content. If *Twitter* is a social “network,” it does not make sense to include these accounts in the analyses. Instead, the focus should be on individuals who are purposively tweeting, linking to content, and interacting with other individual users on *Twitter*.

This project also improves current methodologies examining social media news content by combining the content analysis coding schemes from research on other types of news content with several *Twitter*-specific variables. In this study, the systematic coding of content on *Twitter* is especially important because there is very limited research in this area (Dann, 2010; Greer and Fergesun, 2011; Chew, 2010).

This study relies on previously validated coding measures (Lawrence, 2000; Dunaway, 2008; Tuchman, 1978; Patterson, 2004; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Holton and Lewis, 2011) to analyze news content. In addition, by frequently using *Twitter*, I was able to also recognize and incorporate

several important *Twitter*-specific variables like retweeting, mentioning, and the use hashtags. As researchers gain a better understanding of social media journalism, we can continue to improve on this methodology.

Analyzing Networks

According to Jarvis (2012), Facebook, Google, and Twitter are not in the business of creating content; rather they are in the business of creating and cultivating relationships. He adds that if journalists are going to be successful on social media platforms, they also need to embrace the relationship aspect of social media rather than continuing to emphasize the content. This study supports Jarvis' claim that journalists are not very good at developing relationships with news audiences. However, they are very good at developing relationships with other journalists with both retweeting news content and mentioning each other in their news tweets.

Networking has always been an important tool for journalists. Building and maintaining social networks is not novel; journalists need to interact with fellow journalists, sources, and news audiences in order to be successful news reporters. Yet, the only way researchers could study these interactions was through case studies and participant observations. This is no longer the case. Online networking sites, like *Twitter*, move the relationships online and subsequently create large sets of network data. Because social media provides researchers with the necessary data to study these networks, it is important that we heed the call and use advanced methodological tools in order to examine these networks.

This study is the first attempt at analyzing the interactions between journalists, sources, and news audiences. And while it is limited by the sample, it definitely provides unique insight into how journalists are using social media and the dynamics of a network of journalists. For example, the network of journalists and the accounts they retweeted has a network density score of .023,

indicating a sparse network. The most frequently retweeted individuals were not members of the general public or political actors, but rather journalists working at major news organizations

Another interesting finding is who are the most influential political journalists. While the sample included journalists from different ethnic backgrounds, from various news organizations, and female journalists- the most influential journalists in all three analyses were predominantly white males. None of the journalists ranked in the top 15 percent of any of the influence measures are black and increases in the diversity of media organization and medium are not increasing the number of black and female journalists. In fact, while online political journalists are increasing their influence among other political journalists- these individuals are predominantly white and male.

If journalists are operating in a world of “networked journalism” (Jarvis, 2006), it is not increasing heterogeneity and diversity in the news process. This research suggests that this is not currently occurring among political journalists’ on *Twitter*. While lesser known journalists have higher status levels in social media than they do in traditional media, the vast majority of these individuals are not minorities.

Social networking sites provide researchers with more data on the relationships journalists build and cultivate during the news gathering process. By continuing to analyze these networks, researchers will have better understanding of the construction process of social media news.

Project Limitations

While this project makes significant contributions to the literature, it is also hindered by several limitations, the most important of which is the limited scope of this project. This study examines a sample of national political journalists on *Twitter* on a random sample of days during six months of 2011. The results of this study are not generalizable to all social media journalism or even to all political journalists. Additionally, because of the constantly evolving nature of technology- the

results of this study may not be generalizable to social media news a year or even, six months from now. During the course of this project, *Twitter* and *TweetDeck* (a third party application that a significant number of *Twitter* users to access their feeds) changed certain aspects of their programming and display formatting-known as user interface. For example, *Twitter* deleted the “mention” column in both the PC and mobile versions of the iOS (internetwork operating systems) application in late 2011 but then, due to user demand, restored it several weeks later. These technological changes to the application as well as other software innovations may affect how political journalists are using the site.

However, this study is more than just an examination of social media journalism on *Twitter*. All three of its contributions help bridge the gap between political communication research and the current news media environment. But illustrating what methodological tools are still applicable to this emerging media as well as developing better, more sophisticated analytics to study new media, it serves as a starting point for scholars. And while the logistics of *Twitter* may change, the tools used in this study remain relevant to other studies of social media journalism.

Directions for Future Research

By providing a systematic analysis of social media journalism, this study demonstrates that the previously established normative practices of journalists do not directly translate to social media journalism. News organizational factors like ownership structure of the news organization and the type of medium that the journalists works for are significant influences on news quality measures, yet in opposite directions than predicted. As explained previously, this may be indicative of the different factors contributing to a journalist’s use of social media. For example, a print journalist is confined to a certain number of words in his or her news reporting. Therefore, he or she may use social media as an outlet for the additional news deemed less important, or “not fit to print.” On the

other hand, online journalists are less limited by space and time constraints. This may have a different effect on their use of social media. This study is the first attempt at examining these differences, but clearly more work is needed. As Zaller (1999) argues, journalists strive for a high quality news product. This project demonstrates that, while this may be true, quality varies among journalists using social media. Future research examining social media news quality needs to expand the sample to a more diverse group of journalists, covering a variety of different news beats, in order to provide any generalization of these findings. Because news quality was only one aspect of this data, the measures are rather simple. Future studies need to examine additional measures of news quality in order to expand on these findings.

This project provides important empirical support for many claims found in theoretical discussions of how social media news may differ from traditional news. These findings lend credibility to scholars who have argued that technological changes are affecting news content (Hamilton, 2004; Jarvis, 2006; Pavlik, 2000). These findings also validate studies demonstrating Cook's (1998) and Sparrow's (1999) arguments- that organizational factors are strong determinants of news products (Dunaway, 2008; 2011; Bovitz et al., 2003; Hamilton, 2004). By applying this institutional analysis to a new form of journalism, it lends even more credibility to these studies. However, the research cannot stop here. Social media are a vast medium and can differ based on a variety of different variables including the type of site, the country of the IP address, and whether an individual is using the mobile version. It is our responsibility as researchers to continue to expand our analyses to additional mediums in order to provide a more nuanced and complete understanding of how technology may influence news content.

Social media-specific traits are significant predictors of both news quality and social media influence. This is demonstrated in the content analysis and the social network analysis sections of this project. Tweets from journalists with the most followers were of a lower news quality than those

from journalists with fewer followers. So while the number of followers may translate to the social media form of “news markets,” it is not a predictor of social media influence. The journalists with the highest levels of influence on *Twitter* were not the ones with the most followers. This may be directly related to how journalists are using *Twitter*. Despite their intentions, journalists most frequently interact with fellow journalists on social media and rarely engage with news audiences. This is counter to Jarvis’ (2006) “networked journalism” theory, which argues that social media can “save” journalism by allow journalists to connect with audiences. In the Fall 2009 Nieman Reports, Skoler writes “Mainstream media see social media as tools to help them distribute and market their content... Social media are the route back to a connection with the audience. And if we use them to listen, we’ll learn how we can add value in the new culture” (p. 38). This project suggests that journalists have yet to view social media in this way. This does not mean that they are not using it interesting ways. The ability to connect, interact, and share news from other journalists is an innovation that we have not ever seen before. Future research needs to focus on the ways journalists are using social media, instead of developing the “ideal.” By studying actual social media use, we can help the industry better understand this new model of journalism.

Finally, a next step in this research is to link examinations of news content to news audience effects. The majority of political communication research deals with messaging effects, including public opinion and voting behavior. This is an important part of the political communication paradigm and an in-depth analysis of the effects of social media news is an obvious gap in the current research. However, any study that focuses entirely on effects without paying close attention to the content is insufficient. For this reason, I focused this project on studying content with the intention of linking the content analysis to media effects in future research.

The Future of Social Media Journalism and Social Media Research

In Hermida's (2011) prediction for the future of social media journalism, he provides the following quote from Roy Amara, "With every change in technology that affects consumer behavior, we tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." His argument is that in the near future, social media will be so entrenched in how we communicate and how we receive information, that the technology behind it will become "invisible" (Hermida, 2011). We are not at that point yet in social media journalism. Media organizations are just beginning to realize its full potential, and its effect. Less than five years ago, media organizations treated social media as a fad; unstable and not related to the goals of news organizations. Media organizations viewed social media as just a *new* method for distributing the *same* content. These organizations are only beginning to recognize the importance that social media has on news reporting, and they are also only beginning to try to control it.

Skeptics argue that social media, especially in terms of news distribution, do not have staying power. Like most media technologies and innovations, social media will become entrenched within the establishment. Media conglomerates will appropriate the new technologies of social media, therefore cancelling out some of the innovative potential of the new and exciting medium (Hermida, 2011). While this may come to fruition, I argue that social media journalism is not as easily absorbed by mainstream news organizations as previous media technologies (e.g., blogs). More individuals are using social media than read a newspaper, watch television news, or even go online for news. In fact, every one in seven minutes spent online is spent on a social media site (Comscore, 2011). If news organizations try to move their social media component away from the larger networking sites and to their own websites, they will lose a large portion of their audience. The reason why social media journalism is growing exponentially is because everyone is on the same site, requiring minimal effort from the individual user. Even if an individual is not actively searching for news, they are exposed to

information (by-product learning) from simply going to the site. If news organizations move the content away from these sites, their audiences will be limited to the active news consumers and few others. Social media journalism works because it operates outside of the news organizations (and the subsequent pressures, constraints, and boundaries). As social media becomes an even more intrinsic part of everyday behaviors, social media journalism will become a key component of the news media environment.

It is an exciting time to be a political communication researcher. Nobody knows what the future will bring in terms of new technologies, new methodologies, and avenues for new research. It is also an exciting time for journalists, who are confronted by technological advances and the introduction of the “real-time news cycle.” Yet, it is also a challenging time for both researchers and journalists. Technology seems to change almost daily, requiring constant vigilance in order to stay informed on these changes. And while this may seem tiresome, it is only by embracing these changes that we, as researchers, are able to provide a better understanding of the political news environment.

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APPENDIX A CODING GUIDE

The excel file will come with the following basic information in the first 4 columns.

COLUMN 1: Name of journalist

COLUMN 2: Hour/Tweet of tweet

COLUMN 3: If the tweet was a retweet of somebody else, the name of the original twitter handle will appear here.

COLUMN 4: Content of Tweet

All of the coding will come from column 4; do not edit the first four columns.

COLUMN 5: Was this an original post? (Assign a “1” for yes and leave it blank for no.)

Refers to a post originated by the journalist (not a retweet or “RT”) without @replying or “at replying” to other users.

COLUMN 6: Was this a retweet “RT”? (Assign a “1” for yes and leave it blank for no.)

This refers to a post that the journalist did not originate. A retweet is identified by “RT” followed by @user and the user’s original post. Retweets can also be identified as “...message...(via @user).” Sometimes a short message precedes the RT. Still identify this post as a RT. This should be easily identified using Column 3.

COLUMN 7: Who is the RT or MT...

1. Journalist working for the same news organization
2. Journalist who doesn’t work for the same news organization
3. Political actor/organization
4. member of the general public/unofficial source
5. Other type of traditional source (academic, lawyer, political commentator)
8. unsure

COLUMN 8: If the tweet included any additional content (a comment before or after the retweet), was that content? If the tweet did not include any additional content leave this blank.

1. Agreeing with the original tweet
2. Disagreeing with the original tweet
0. Unsure/Didn’t have a comment

COLUMN 9: Was this a Mention @? (Assign a “1” for yes and leave it blank for no.)

This refers to a tweet that is directed towards another user.

COLUMN 10: Who is this mention?

1. Journalist working at same news organization
2. Journalist not working at same news organization
3. Political actor/organization
4. General public/unofficial source
5. Traditional source
6. Themselves
7. 3rd party (restaurant, technology company, etc...)

0. Unsure

COLUMN 11: Is this mention the primary newsmaker?

1. Yes
2. No

COLUMN 12: Was there a link? (Assign a “1” for yes and leave it blank for no.)
When a link appears in the post, the tweet should be categorized here.

COLUMN 13: Where did the link take you?

1. To a news story written by that journalist
2. To a news story written by someone in their news organization
3. To a news story by another news organization
4. To a blog not operated by a news organization
5. To a political website (not a blog)
6. To a photostream/YouTube video
7. Other, please specify
0. Unsure

COLUMN 14: Was there a hashtag? (Assign a “1” for yes and leave it blank for no.)

COLUMN 15: Is this hashtag?

1. Related to searching for news stories on this topic and seen as “newsworthy.”
2. Related to searching for news stories on this topic but not newsworthy (i.e. humor)
3. Unrelated

COLUMN 16: Topic of tweet

1. a political news story/news item
2. sports
3. family/personal
4. entertainment
5. work-related (any tweet that does not deal with a news story but refers to the person’s job at a news organization, or promoting an upcoming appearance on a radio/tv show, or thanking individuals for appearing on news shows)
6. travel
7. a different type of news item (unrelated to politics)
8. weather
9. OTHER: write in
0. unsure

COLUMN 18: Soft/Hard News

1. Hard News

Hard news stories contain factual presentations of occurrences deemed newsworthy (constrained by timeliness).

2. Soft News

Soft news is more sensational, more personality-centered, less time-bound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news.

0. Unsure

STOP HERE IF IT IS NOT A NEWS TWEET*****

COLUMN 19: Primary newsmaker of tweet

1. President Obama
2. Presidential candidate or campaign staff member (not Obama): JUST WRITE NAME
3. Congressional member
4. Supreme court member or other judicial newsmaker
5. Other national political actor not affiliated with administration
6. Cabinet or administration actor/ WH source
7. Political candidate (not presidential): specify
8. Media actor: specify JUST WRITE NAME
9. Foreign political actor
10. Other
0. Unsure

COLUMN 20: Did the tweet contain an actual quote (either in quotation marks or implied quote) from/or about the primary newsmaker?

1. Yes
2. No

COLUMN 21: What was the primary purpose of the tweet?

1. Live-tweet news event
2. Report breaking news
3. Offer opinion on news story
4. Self-Promotion
5. Link to a news story
6. Routine reporting
7. Humor
0. Other

COLUMN 22: What was the dominant frame of the tweet?

1. Game/Strategy

Stories about politicians winning or losing elections, legislative debates, or politics in general; stories about politicians' (other groups') strategies for winning (e.g. campaign tactics, legislative maneuvers); stories about the implications of elections or legislative debates for politicians and parties; stories focused narrowly on specific legislative or implementation developments (e.g., who did what yesterday on a certain bill), on the "tone" of legislative debates, or on the implications of these developments on politics.

2. Issue

Stories about public policy problems and solutions; descriptions of the substance of legislation, proposed legislation, or other government programs; descriptions of politicians' stands or

statements on policy issues; stories about the general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public.

3. Mixed

 Roughly equal predominance of the ISSUE and GAME frames.

4. None

 Did not include an ISSUE or GAME frame.

COLUMN 23: Main topic of the political news tweet

1. Current legislation or Supreme Court cases (super-committee, jobs bill)
2. Legislation that has either just passed or failed (including US court appointments)
3. Past legislation (legislation already passed or failed)
4. Foreign affairs (not related to national security)
5. National security (war on terror, airport security)
6. National economic issue (unemployment, inflation, occupy wallstreet protests)
7. Election/campaign news
8. President Obama/Executive office/WH meetings
9. Mainstream Media
0. Other

COLUMN 24: If it was a campaign related tweet (7 from previous question), what was the election frame?

1. Horserace (mention of polls, leading)
2. Issue
3. Personality
4. Strategy (being on message, campaign tactics, fundraising)
0. Other

COLUMN 25: Was this tweet supposed to be funny?

1. Yes
2. No

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND ONLINE SURVEY

What is the primary reason you use Twitter?

On a normal workday, about how many times do you log onto Twitter?

On what device (computer, smart phone, iPad) do you access Twitter?

How often do you post on Twitter? Do you try to post everyday? Multiple times a day?

How important do you think it is to respond to tweets?

Do you think of your Twitter account as being a personal account or a work account?

Have you ever tweeted something before it was reported through traditional news distribution mechanisms?

Do you have any concerns when you retweeted something from a reporter from a different media organization?

Do you ever use Twitter as a reaction to spontaneous news events?

How do you find sources on Twitter?

Do you ever contact or follow-up with a source that you originally found on Twitter?

How do you cite Twitter contacts in your news stories?

Twitter as part of News Reporting Institutions:

- 1) Does your news organization have a policy or guidelines that restrict or guide your Twitter use?
 - How were you told about these policies/guidelines?
- 2) Does your news organization encourage Twitter use among its employees?
- 3) Can you think of a way that you have use Twitter as a way to communicate with other journalists?
- 4) Have you ever communicated with political actors using Twitter?
- 5) How do you think Twitter is affecting political news reporting?

Online survey

Briefly describe your Twitter use. How often do you tweet? How often do you check Twitter?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "Not important at all" and 5 indicating "Very important," how important is Twitter to your news reporting?

1, Not important at all

2, Somewhat not important

3, Neutral

4, Somewhat important

5, Very important

Does your news organization have social media guidelines to regulate your use of social media? If so, briefly explain the guidelines.

Why do you use Twitter? What is your favorite aspect of Twitter?

Briefly describe your opinion of retweeting. What do you retweet? Do you feel responsible for the accuracy of your retweets?

How do you think Twitter is changing journalism?

If you had to describe social media journalism in one word, what word would you use?

VITA

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, Ashley Elizabeth Kirzinger completed her undergraduate education at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, where she double majored in English literature and communication. She received a masters' degree in communication at Wake Forest University where she studied the intersection of political and religious rhetoric. She began her doctoral studies in media and public affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication in 2008. Her research focuses on political communication, specifically examining how changes in the current media landscape are affecting both news content and media effects.