10-23-2018

# Political #Tweet-Talkin': How Reporters and Politicians Use Twitter in State Government

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POLITICAL #TWEET-TALKIN': HOW REPORTERS AND POLITICIANS USE TWITTER
IN STATE GOVERNMENT

A Thesis

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
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by
Jennifer Korth
B.A., Northern Kentucky University, 2016
December 2018

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Accept what you are able to do and what you are not able to do. Accept the past as past, without denying it or discarding it. Learn to forgive yourself and to forgive others. Don't assume that it's too late to get involved." – Mitch Albom, Tuesdays With Morrie

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to everyone who has supported me throughout this journey. To my committee chair, Dr. Joshua Darr, I cannot thank you enough for bearing with me through the ups and downs of this endeavor. Your guidance and reassurance helped me realize the true importance of completing this work. To my thesis committee members, Professor Bob Mann and Dr. Martin Johnson, thank you for helping to shape this work into one that can benefit academia, professionals, and constituents. To Dr. Lance Porter, thank you for teaching me the fundamentals of Crimson Hexagon to help better understand the conservation on Twitter regarding Kentucky's dynamic 2018 General Assembly.

Chelsey, Lauren, Erica, Mary, Martina, and Kriesten—my Baton Rouge Krewe—and Dr. Jenee Slocum and my Manship School family, thank you all for making Baton Rouge my home away from home. You all are the amazing lagniappe of my Louisiana adventure. And to all my friends at home in Kentucky, thank you for your sweet words of comfort and encouragement. I love that our friendship knows no distance.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to say thank you to my family. Mom, Dad, Kevin and Kathryn, thank you for your unwavering love and support throughout these last three years. Without you, completing my masters would not have been possible. And to all the members of my Kremer family, thank you for all your encouragement, especially you Grandma.

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## ABSTRACT

Political and media institutions have a dynamic relationship at both the national and state level. Over time, their relationship has changed as a result of technological advances. Twitter has become a powerful communication tool for both politicians and media professionals and has changed the way these two groups correspond with one another and with constituents. Little research has been conducted on state-level political and media institutions' use of Twitter and this two-project piece aims to fill this void. Project 1 identifies the extent to which journalists covered United States governors' tweets in 2017. Generally, very few tweets per governor were covered. Project 2 is a case study about Kentucky politicians' and media's use of Twitter during the state's 2018 Legislative Session.  By observing their use of the legislative hashtag, #kyga18, it became evident that Twitter served as an educational tool, where tweets were used to explain the complexities of critical pension reform legislation that would affect many Kentucky residents and their families. Overall, politicians were most influential on Twitter, and   media's usage was not as prominent. Nonetheless, this piece provides a basic understanding of Twitter's presence in state-level political and media institutions and serves as a stepping stone for further research to be conducted.

**INTRODUCTION**

The national political and media institutions in the United States receive the lion's share of attention from scholars and pundits alike. State political and media institutions, however, are far more influential due to their extensive reach into the daily lives of their constituents (Littlewood, 1972). Interactions between state political actors and media personnel operate differently than those of their federal counterparts (Cook, 1998; Arnold, 2004; Edwards & Wood, 1999). Plagued by a lack of investment exemplified by failing statehouse reporting bureaus, state officials' and journalists' relationships are more difficult to manage and navigate. Access to one another is in decline as newspapers are unable to dedicate resources such as reporters, column space, or other resources towards coverage of statehouse activities (Matsa & Boyles, 2014; Darr, 2015; Druckman, 2005; Hayes & Lawless, 2015; Towner & Munoz, 2016; Weiss, 2015). As a result, political actors and journalists have sought new ways to interact with one another. The adoption of Twitter by both groups has received very little attention in the political communication field, as most focus has gone to national reporting and campaigns (Garud-Patkar & Kalyango, Jr., 2017; Kim, Gonzenbach, Vargo, & Kim, 2016; Kreiss, 2016; Parmelee, 2013 & 2014; Murthy & Petto, 2015; Towner & Munoz, 2016; Wallsten, 2015).

The decline in statehouse bureaus has resulted in fewer journalists covering state politics, meaning fewer opportunities for state officials to communicate information to state residents. Although the public's interest in statehouse coverage is weaker than that of national coverage and other topics (Graber, 1993; Hopkins, 2018; Jennings & Zeigler, 1970; Layton and Walton, 1998; Lyons, Jaeger, & Wolak, 2013), this lack of interest generally comes from the public's inability to comprehend the complexities of state policy and the legislative process. The legislative process is convoluted and often hard to understand by both average citizens and elites

(Littlewood, 1972; Lupia, 2016). There is a "cost" involved with seeking out political information (Zaller, 1992). In order to educate everyone—experts and elites included—communication must take place between state politicians and journalists (Littlewood, 1972; Lupia, 2016; "Tools of the Trade: 15 Tips," 2014). Ultimately, the public relies on the communication between journalists and state officials to better understand the intricacies of the legislative process and the policies that affect their everyday lives (Littlewood, 1972).

As social media has become an integral part of our lives, it has become difficult to ignore social media's impact on our lives and governmental processes. State political officials and journalists have needed to incorporate social media such as Twitter into their daily interactions in order to better serve and inform the public. The adoption of Twitter by state political and media institutions ultimately influences the political knowledge and engagement of their residents at the level of government that most directly affects their residents' daily lives, and we know little about these local dynamics of online media-government interactions.

In this two-part project, I analyze state political actors' and journalists' adoption of Twitter and their use of the platform for facilitated communication. Project 1 investigates the extent to which statehouse journalists are covering governors' tweets, therefore contributing to the context of their overall state political environment. I collect data from media coverage of the Twitter feeds of the 50 United States governors in 2017 and identify whether their state's newspaper journalists cited gubernatorial tweets in state political news coverage. The importance of this broad-scale study is to identify how Twitter's adoption by prominent state political officials (governors) affects state media's adoption and coverage of Twitter to inform constituents' state political knowledge. I find that governors' tweets are being covered by state journalists, however the variety of tweets being used is relatively small.

Project 2 analyzes the extent to which legislative hashtags are utilized by state journalists and political officials during legislative sessions. I utilize a case study that monitors Kentucky's legislative hashtag for the 2018 KY General Assembly: #kyga18. The case study highlights a key instance where Twitter assisted state political actors and media professionals with their explanations to the public regarding a critical policy issue—Kentucky's pension crisis—addressed during the 2018 Legislative Session. I find that state politicians are adopting Twitter, using legislative hashtags, and influencing Twitter conversation to a sizeable degree. Media professionals, however, lag in their use of legislative hashtags and their influence on Twitter conversations.

There is a great need to study technology's influence, particularly Twitter's, on state-level political and media institutions. The impact these institutions have on their relationship with each other and with the public is important to identify and examine for potential areas of improvement. Not only does policy affect our lives, but also technology and communication do too. Overall, my findings show traditional media's inattention towards gubernatorial tweets while also highlighting Twitter's role in critical, state-level policy discussions. By analyzing Twitter users' tweets revealing multiple stakeholders' reactions to state-policy initiatives, I demonstrate Twitter's impact on state-level communication.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Twitter, one of today's many social media platforms, offers a convenient location for information to be shared and discourse to occur (CoSIDA New Media/Technology Committee & Syme, 2011). Politicians have adopted Twitter as one of their many social media platforms to engage with journalists and constituents (Cook, J.M., 2015; Cook, J.M., 2017; Smith & Rose, 2009; "Tools of the Trade: 15 tips," 2014). In some ways, their presence on social media is helping to combat the loss of information the public is experiencing due to the decrease in local news coverage— especially in local newspapers (Weiss, 2015; Smith & Dorsch, 2009). Since reporters are unable to cover every legislator or attend every event the governor attends every single day, Twitter allows political actors to communicate their agendas with journalists and the public, updating them on state political issues and activities (Weiss, 2015). Twitter's principle, interactive feature, the hashtag— "a word or abbreviation that has the '#' sign in front of it"— can attract journalists' and Twitter users' attention to bring awareness to specific issues (Parmelee, 2014, p. 438, 444). "The political value of using hashtags is that all tweets that use a particular hashtag are grouped together on Twitter and can be searched by anyone, including journalists. Hashtags allow political leaders to spread their views beyond their followers" (Parmelee, 2014, p. 438) While some politicians may intentionally tweet to grab journalists' and/or constituents' attention, some politicians, however, may not intend to gain this attention. Identifying politicians' intent with their tweets is an endeavor worth exploring, but outside the scope of this project.

Nonetheless, with a relationship like the one political journalists and politicians have, Twitter can facilitate communication and enrich the relationship they have with one another. Journalists and politicians have a reciprocal relationship, one that Verweij (2012) says is

"'mutually dependent on each other, in terms of 'finding news and spreading news.'" (Parmelee, 2014, p. 439) There are costs and benefits associated with this relationship, and depending on the situation, one group may benefit more than the other.

For example, politicians rely on journalists to cover their agendas. Known as information subsidies, politicians want information from their press releases, speeches, videos, or other general commentary to be shared or mentioned in news coverage (Kiousis, Laskin, & Kim, 2011; Kiousis and Strömbäck, 2010; Marland, 2012; Parmelee, 2013; Turk, 1986). Their hope is that the sharing of this information informs their constituents about the tasks they are accomplishing (Arnold, 1990, 1993, & 2004; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Cook, 1989; Mayhew, 1974). Journalists in-turn rely on politicians for content and information subsidies. Journalists believe it is their duty to inform the public about the workings of government and politicians' agendas (Arnold, 2004; Lyons et al, 2013). They conduct interviews and attend press conferences, so they can collect content to report to the public.

Tensions can arise, however, when either politicians or journalists do not believe they are getting the most out of their relationship (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). During these times, journalists' tasks of gathering background information can be more difficult than one may realize. Additionally, politicians may not earn the coverage they hoped they would receive. Overall, Twitter offers both groups the opportunity to navigate and normalize interactions in a new way.

If politicians become unhappy in the relationship, one tactic they may deploy is withholding information from journalists. Another possible tactic is giving journalists the run-around in order to control journalists' approach to a story. When this occurs, a journalist may resort to other methods of collecting information. Seeking out other sources of information,

potentially unrelated to politicians' standard information subsidies, is one way journalists overcome politicians' curveballs. Therefore, politicians are at the mercy of the coverage journalists give them.

Journalists are beginning to adopt Twitter as an additional source of information (Ahmad, 2010; Broersma & Graham, 2012; Farhi, 2009; Hermida, 2010; Nadler, 2011; Parmelee, 2013; Parmelee, 2014). What may have once been a difficult task for journalists— getting the run-around from politicians wanting to control a story— has now become difficult for politicians whose comments on social media, particularly Twitter, are being used as content in journalists' stories. Since Twitter allows journalists to follow politicians without obtaining permission from them, politicians are at the mercy of journalists using their tweets however they would like in a story (Grant, Moon, & Grant, 2010; Kim, et al (2016); Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Vargo, Guo, McCombs, & Shaw, 2014). As Parmelee and Bichard (2012) learned from one journalist, "Because it's on Twitter, it's fair game to use for news media…(152)" (Parmelee, 2014, p. 438; McGregor, 2018). North Dakota journalists found statehouse Representative Roscoe Streyle-R's tweeting style to be newsworthy when Linden Stave, a North Dakota resident and Concordia College student, petitioned to have Rep. Streyle removed from office following his excessive use of the word "libtard" in his tweets towards other Twitter users and national lawmakers (Hageman, 2018; Musland, 2018). More politically incorrect than his use of the word "moron" in tweets to describe a North Dakota attorney, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and now former U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Rep. Streyle did apologize for his "poor choice of words." (Hageman, 2018) According to Hageman, Rep. Streyle's insults have extended across other social media platforms like Facebook. Following his post of a degrading comment about another statehouse representative, Streyle answered a question about the appropriateness of insulting

people on social media by saying, "Trump does it, he's the president of the United States," and then laughed adding, "no it's not." (Hageman, 2018)

What we see here is a state politician receiving coverage due to his Twitter behavior. What we also see are his apologies being offered, but Rep. Streyle recognizing the impact his tweets are having on political culture—both at the state and national level. Despite the public's and Twitterverse's reactions, he seems to understand that his tweets are as available to media and public scrutiny—or praise— as President Donald Trump's tweets are at the national level. In this case, Rep. Streyle seemed disappointed with the coverage he received. Although he explained he did not intend for "libtard" to be interpreted as a combined phrase of "liberal" and "retarded," this is certainly how some journalists, members of the public, and Twitter interpreted his wording.

Because journalists are starting to use Twitter as a source, Rep. Streyle and other politicians can choose to change their tweeting behavior to receive the coverage that they want. Another option is to continue their normal tweeting style and receive coverage that journalists are going to give them as a result of their tweets being fair game for sourcing. In Rep. Streyle's case, he chose to make his Twitter account private for some time in an effort to avoid further coverage that he deemed unfavorable to himself.

Based on Rep. Streyle's deactivation of his Twitter account and journalists' mindsets that tweets are fair game for sourcing, it is clear that journalists have great institutional power when turning to Twitter for reporting support (McGregor, 2018). Journalists' usage of Twitter is impactful especially when it becomes necessary to go beyond the reliance on politicians for information—dismissing the dynamics of the relationship—for the sake of informing the public. When journalists deviate from politician-provided information subsidies, politicians like Rep.

Streyle typically become frustrated with not having some control over the news' agenda. Former Vermont state senator and U.S. Congressman Richard Mallary expressed his frustrations with political journalists, offering the opinion that journalists often make "excessive colorations" about state and national leaders and their information subsidies in news coverage (Littlewood, 1972, p. 43).Although Congressman Mallary was referring to the coverage he and other politicians received by the major dailies in his state, his sentiments are echoed by Rep. Streyle and other politicians today who have received unwanted or "misinterpreted" coverage of their tweets in local newspapers. For example, in 2013, Minnesota's Rep. Ryan Winkle-D tweeted his criticism of the Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling to overturn a key part of the Voting Rights Act (Camia, 2013). Rep. Winkle tweeted there were "four accomplices to race discrimination and one Uncle Thomas," referring to the Court's only current-sitting, black jurist, Justice Clarence Thomas, as "Uncle Thomas." (Camia, 2013) Rep. Winkle corresponded with a *Minneapolis City Pages* reporter on Twitter and tweeted he "did not understand 'Uncle Tom' as a racist term," offering "there seems to be some debate about it. I do apologize for it, however." (Camia, 2013) Later in an interview with the Associated Press, he explained that he was trying to highlight institutional racism that stems from the court's decision (Camia, 2013). "I used a term that was too hot for the issue, but I didn't intend for it to be derogatory," Winkler told the Associated Press (Camia, 2013).

Again, Rep. Winkle serves as another example of politician's knowing that his tweets can make an impact, but can sometimes forget that journalists and the public will determine the feedback politicians receive as a result of those tweets. What Rep. Winkle thought was a tweet alerting the nation of the damage the Court's ruling had on the Voting Rights Act, instead provided him with negative feedback and ridicule for his use of a racially offensive reference.

This backfire in news coverage again showcases just how impactful politicians' tweets can be on political culture when journalists cover and inform the public about their tweets. It is important to remember that reactions to coverage—positive or negative— greatly influences the relationships politicians and journalists have with one another.

The dynamics of journalists' and politicians' communication relationship are very much a give-and-take. Journalists do not feel bound to following a politicians' agenda, even if it means gathering information becomes a greater challenge. They report exclusively for the purpose of educating the public. Journalists make the decision whether to cover politicians' tweets, not the politician. "Even if the content in a tweet is included in a story or leads to a story idea, the end result might not be agenda building in the way the political leader intended." (Parmelee, 2014, p. 439) Some journalists may choose to use politicians' tweets as contributions to their stories. Others may choose not to. Nonetheless, as technology has changed, so too have conversations about journalistic norms. The media's adoption of Twitter has sparked self-reflection and external evaluation of institutional norms regarding bias, media trust and performance, interacting with followers, and using Twitter for content distribution (Broersma and Graham, 2013; Chorley & Mottershead, 2016; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; Meyer & Tang, 2015; Parmelee, 2014; Revers, 2014). Since Twitter has becomes a more prominent tool for reporting, journalists are weighing the value and impact of adding tweets to their political news coverage.

One camp of journalists believes adding tweets to their coverage is no more persuasive than covering press releases or other events (Parmelee, 2014, p. 442). This group suggests that tweets typically reflect information found in a press release or press conference, and do not see tweets as any more or less influential to their communication with politicians. Every now and then, tweets will spark a journalist's interest and they will reach out to a political official via

phone call (Parmelee, 2014, p. 443). But in general, tweets are viewed as equally informative as press releases, personal contact, and advertisements.

The other camp of journalists, however, believes that certain political officials' tweets do offer newsworthy information. Hence, journalists will include the tweets in their coverage (Parmelee, 2014, p. 442). Tweets deemed worthy of coverage are "timely, provide supplemental information to current news stories, act as substitutes for those political actors who are hard to schedule an interview with, and offer 'insider perspective' on major issues." (Parmelee, 2014, p. 444-445) Overall, many journalists see these tweets as quotes contributing information to their stories and not as items that "alter the overall tone" of their stories (Parmelee, 2014, p. 442-443). Additionally, journalists reiterate that quoting tweets is an example of second-level agenda building, since tweets often add context to salient issues that may (or may not) be favorable to the tweeting official (Parmelee, 2014, p. 443).

To put into perspective the value journalists see in using politicians' tweets, Wallsten (2015) found that tweets from candidates running for president are more likely to be cited in newspapers, unlike politicians running for a congressional or state government seat who "received almost no mentions of their tweets." Wallsten (2015) also found that in the 2012 U.S. presidential election, journalists were more likely to reference tweets to "ornament" their coverage and not as a pure, informational subsidy (Kiousis et al., 2011; Kiousis and Strömbäck, 2010; Marland, 2012; Turk, 1986). Furthermore, journalists were more inclined to include opinionated tweets in their coverage, more so than politicians' tweets containing acknowledgements, call to actions, or factual information (Wallsten, 2015, 35-36).

Although journalists' coverage of tweets is dependent upon these factors, it must not be forgotten that coverage may be most influenced by politicians' use of Twitter during political

campaigns and elections. Elections are exciting political events that draw considerable attention

from the public—more so than the nitty-gritty political operations taking place every day

(Broersma & Graham, 2012; Kim et al, 2016; Ko, Kwon, Kim, Lee, & Choi, 2014; Murthy &

Petto, 2015; Wallsten, 2015). Politicians' tweets during their campaigns may be more interesting,

and journalists may be more likely to report this content as tweets typically compliment the

"horse-race" style coverage utilized during elections. Journalists may choose to cover tweets

during campaigns because it defies the spirit and intensity of pack journalism, or because they

are easily accessible and substitute for following a candidate on the campaign trail (Hamby,

2013).

     Twitter-use related to political engagement has also seen far more exploration and

coverage due to Twitter's effects on public opinion—another sociocultural interest that attracts

the attention of politicians, media, and the public (Grant, Moon, & Grant, 2010; Garud-Patkar

and Kalyango, Jr., 2017; Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Howard, 2010; Lee, Kim, & Kim,

2016; Parmelee and Bichard, 2012; Yu, Kaufmann, and Diermeier, 2008). Tweets responding to

policy, political culture, and other political activities are not hard to find from politicians,

journalists, and the public. However, what has not been fully understood up to this point is the

extent to which *state* politicians and journalists have adopted Twitter. My work aims to better

our understanding of Twitter adoption by state political and media institutions. Recognizing the

importance of communication between these institutions, as well as the public, is imperative to

ensure state political operations are addressing constituents' political needs.

     State policies like tax reform, pensions, and healthcare are more likely to impact a

resident's livelihood, yet they receive far less coverage due to an overall lack of understanding

legislative processes and overexposure to national government coverage (Graber, 1993; Hopkins,

2018; Jennings & Zeigler, 1970; Layton and Walton, 1998; Lyons, et al., 2013). In a perfect world, everyday political operations such as policy-making would dominate news coverage.

Twitter has transformed national political and media institutions' communication in many ways. Most notably, communication through Twitter has improved regarding elections, journalist norms, and political engagement. Additionally, I believe politicians have a new institutional responsibility to utilize Twitter as a means of connecting with journalists and the public to inform both stakeholder groups about influential public policy. If they choose not to, communication between the groups will suffer, resulting in possible negative consequences to constituents' lives and state governmental operations. To avoid this situation, Projects 1 and 2 demonstrate the importance and need for state politicians and journalists to adopt Twitter and strengthen their communications and interactions with one another.

**PROJECT 1**

**Methodology**

Project 1 is a content analysis investigating the extent to which governors' tweets are incorporated in states' local newspapers. Because this is an initial, exploratory endeavor, it seemed appropriate to use a sample that is smaller in size to gain a general understanding of the baseline use of tweets in newspaper articles. With this idea in mind, news articles published in all 50 United States' state and local newspapers during the year 2017 (January 1 through December 31, 2017) were collected from Newspapers.com. Since Project 1 specifically looks at governors, the year 2017 was chosen in an effort to minimize confounding variables such as increased coverage of governors' tweets during federal or congressional elections. In 2017, there were only two governors' races taking place— New Jersey and Virginia— and both of which the incumbent was not allowed to be re-elected due to term limits.

The use of Newspapers.com is justifiable in that the database gave accessibility to a larger number of newspapers than those found in databases such as Access World News/NewsBank and LexisNexis. For example, Newspapers.com provided access to one of Kentucky's largest circulating newspapers, The *Courier Journal* of Louisville. Access World News/NewsBank, unfortunately, does not have the *Courier Journal* uploaded to its system. Access to thousands of newspapers is critical to a project seeking clarification on adaptations in journalistic norms, but filtering through these newspapers and their articles must also be realistic and manageable to analyze.

I began collecting articles by searching each governor's last name, and the word "tweeted" along with it. For example, to identify whether Alabama's governor, Kay Ivey's, tweets were used in state and local newspapers, the search "Ivey" SPACE "tweeted" was

conducted (Wallsten, 2015). Every governors' name was searched this way first, however, an additional search had to be conducted for the following 31 states: Arizona, Connecticut, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

When the governors of these states were searched as "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted," several results, sometimes hundreds to a thousand, were generated per governor. The governors of Texas and Wisconsin had over 200 individual search results, while the governors of South Dakota and Nevada had less than 20. Because of these large results and inconsistencies, an initial scan of the newspaper pages was conducted. The reason for the large returns became evident very quickly. Based on the "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted" search, Newspapers.com pulled any newspaper page that had both the governor's last name and the word "tweeted" on it, regardless if they were both used in the same article or not. Most of the time, a newspaper page would have one article mentioning a state governor, and another article on the same page referencing President Trump's tweets. Hence, there was a need to refine the search for these high-result states by tying the word "tweeted" to the governor's last name ("Last Name tweeted"). For example, Wisconsin's governor, Scott Walker, was searched as "Walker tweeted." This ensured only governors' tweets would be pulled and collected.

Any governor with "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted" results greater than 18—a manageable number of results to analyze individually—were subject to the new search, "Last Name tweeted." Once this narrowed search was conducted, only Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin came back as having substantial

amounts of articles to still sift through. Nonetheless, the number of results per governor became much more manageable to analyze (less than 65 total search results each).

While weeding through the search results, any time a governor's tweet was directly or indirectly quoted, the newspaper name, the date, the tweet, and some additional surrounding subtext were cataloged in a spreadsheet. Each tweet was also coded as either a Direct Quote (DQ) or a No Direct Quote (NDQ). Furthermore, it became evident that some of these tweets were used in Editorial, Opinion, or Entertainment sections of the newspaper. This too was coded (for ease: DQ or NDQ+Opinion/ENT) as these sections hold a different purpose than that of regular news coverage.

Based on this coding method, all governors' tweets fell into one of the following categories:

Table 1.1. Search Coding Method

| Original Search | Refined Search |
|---|---|
| "Last Name" "tweeted" DQ | "Last Name tweeted" DQ |
| "Last Name" "tweeted" NDQ | "Last Name tweeted" NDQ |
| "Last Name" "tweeted" DQ+Opinion/ENT | "Last Name tweeted" DQ+Opinion/ENT |
| "Last Name" "tweeted" NDQ+Opinion/ENT | "Last Name tweeted" NDQ+Opinion/ENT |

**Results**

Search One: "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted"

As the methodology stated, each governor was originally searched as "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted." After combining the search result totals for each state, the grand total search

results for "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted" was 5,098. Ten states—Alaska, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming—did not produce any results. Before diving into the "Last Name tweeted" results, it is important to discuss the states that had 18 or less results based on this original search. Nine state governors had 18 or less results from this original search: Alabama's Kay Ivey, Arkansas' Asa Hutchinson, Colorado's John Hickenlooper, Delaware's John Carney, Hawaii's David Ige, Montana's Steve Bullock, Nebraska's Pete Ricketts, Nevada's Brian Sandoval, and South Dakota's Dennis Daugaard.

Collectively, 111 search results were generated from these states, meaning there were 111 potential instances where journalists could have directly quoted these governors' tweets in their local news coverage. Of these 111 searches, there were only four (4/11) instances in which journalists directly quoted governors' tweets. South Dakota had one instance where a journalist quoted Governor Daugaard's remembrance tweet of a fellow public servant who passed away. Montana's governor, Steve Bullock, had his "thoughts and prayers" tweet for the victims of the Las Vegas shooting utilized in one news article. Hawaii's governor, David Ige, had two of his tweets covered by journalists, however the journalists utilized the tweets differently than those who covered Governors Daugaard and Bullock. Instead of using the phrase "Ige tweeted on Xday," the Hawaiian journalists instead simply quoted one tweet as an example of Ige's laid-back, personable tweeting style, and the other as a block quote highlighting Ige's tweet.

As for the next category, "Last Name" "tweeted"NDQ, there were only three (3/111) instances where journalists mentioned governors' tweets and did not cite them word for word. The governors of Nevada, Colorado and Arkansas all had one of their tweets mentioned in a local news article, however they were not directly quoted by the journalists. Finally, only three

instances (3/111) were found where journalists directly quoted a governor's tweet, yet the article was located in the Opinion, Editorial, or Entertainment section of the newspaper. Two of these instances, found in Montana's *Great Falls Tribune*, were tweets that showed Governor Bullock's comical side. One article quoted political, Twitter banter between Governor Bullock and a Montana state senator. Another article quoted Bullock's facetious, "Zombies can wipe out humans (well, except for Montanans) faster than the #mtleg can get an infrastructure bill to desk," tweet. As for the other instance, Nebraska's governor, Steve Ricketts, had a bridge replacement tweet covered in the *Fremont Tribune.* There were no instances were journalists only mentioned (not quoted) governors' tweets in Editorial, Opinion, or Entertainment news sections.

Already from this brief introduction to the data, it is evident that very few governors' tweets are being picked up and utilized in state political journalists' coverage. So far, out of just nine states (AL, AR, CO, DE, HI, MT, NE, NV, SD), only 10 governors' tweets from the year 2017 were covered in state political news coverage. Some of these, as previously stated, were found in other parts of the newspaper, suggesting that even less tweets are being used in generally, "unbiased" political news sections. The next section of data will look at the remaining 31 states that required a refine search to gather potential uses of governors' tweets. Once this data is summarized, a better understanding of the overall use of governors' tweets in state political newspaper coverage will be identified.

Search Two: "Last Name tweeted"

Refining the search for the remaining 31 states eliminated the hundreds of newspaper pages and articles that did not capture coverage of governors' tweets. As a result of the "Last Name tweeted" search, the governors of these 31 states collectively accumulated 201 possible

instances where their tweets were covered by state political journalists. These instances were analyzed in the same manner as the original search results: Direct Quotes (DQ), No Direct Quotes (NDQ), Direct Quotes in the Opinion/Entertainment section (DQ+Opinion/ENT), and No direct quotes in the Opinion/Entertainment section (NDQ+Opinion/ENT).

Of the 201 possible instances, journalists directly quoted governors' tweets in state and local newspaper articles 155 times (155/201). It is important to clarify that this does not mean that 155 different tweets were quoted among the 201 occasions. Frequently, several newspapers in one state would run the same story directly quoting the same tweet. For example, Ohio governor John Kasich's tweet suggesting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad be tried for war crimes was used in 11 different newspapers across Ohio. None of Kasich's other tweets appeared in Ohio's 2017 news coverage, at least not in the newspapers and articles provided by Newspapers.com.

Overall, there were 155 occasions where tweets were found in standard news coverage, and not in an opinion or entertainment section. A couple tweets that received frequent coverage were from Wisconsin governor, Scott Walker, regarding Trump's support of tariffs on Canadian dairy items—protecting Wisconsin dairy farmers—and praising U.S. House Republicans on shifting Medicaid reform back to the states. New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, also had a tweet that was covered frequently in New York newspapers: "Robert E Lee and Stonewall Jackson will be removed from the CUNY hall of great Americans because New York stands against racism…There are many great Americans, many of them New Yorkers worthy of a spot in this great hall. These two confederates are not among them." (7:23-7:24 PM, Aug. 16, 2017, twitter.com)

These tweets were covered frequently because they relate to national, hot-button issues. As it was previously mentioned in the literature review, matters of national concern are more likely to be reported on because the public is more intrigued by national news coverage (Graber, 1993; Hopkins, 2018; Jennings & Zeigler, 1970; Layton and Walton, 1998; Lyons, et al., 2013). The tweets about Wisconsin dairy farmers and U.S. Medicaid reform relate to state politics, however they are simply generalizations. Walker's tweet regarding Wisconsin dairy farmers and Trump's new trade policy only serves as praise instead of an explanation or political analysis on how the tariffs economically and personally affect Wisconsin dairy farmers. Additionally, there is no mention or explanation of the incentives related to bringing U.S. Medicaid policy reform back to the states. Although clarifications about policy measures are uninteresting—the nitty-gritty, not so entertaining details of public policy and state government—it is imperative that politicians offer and justify them as they serve as very important contributions to our everyday lives

As for the remaining three categories, there were 28 occasions where governors' tweets were mentioned, but not directly quoted by journalists (28/201). These too were found in standard news coverage. There were 13 occasions where governors' tweets were directly quoted in Opinion/Entertainment sections (13/201) and only two (2/201) where tweets were mentioned in these sections but were not direct quotes.

**Discussion**

Based on both searches— "Last Name" SPACE "tweeted" and "Last Name tweeted"— and Figure 1 found below, governors' tweets are being covered by state journalists. The variety of tweets being used, however, is relatively small. United States governors had no more than 14
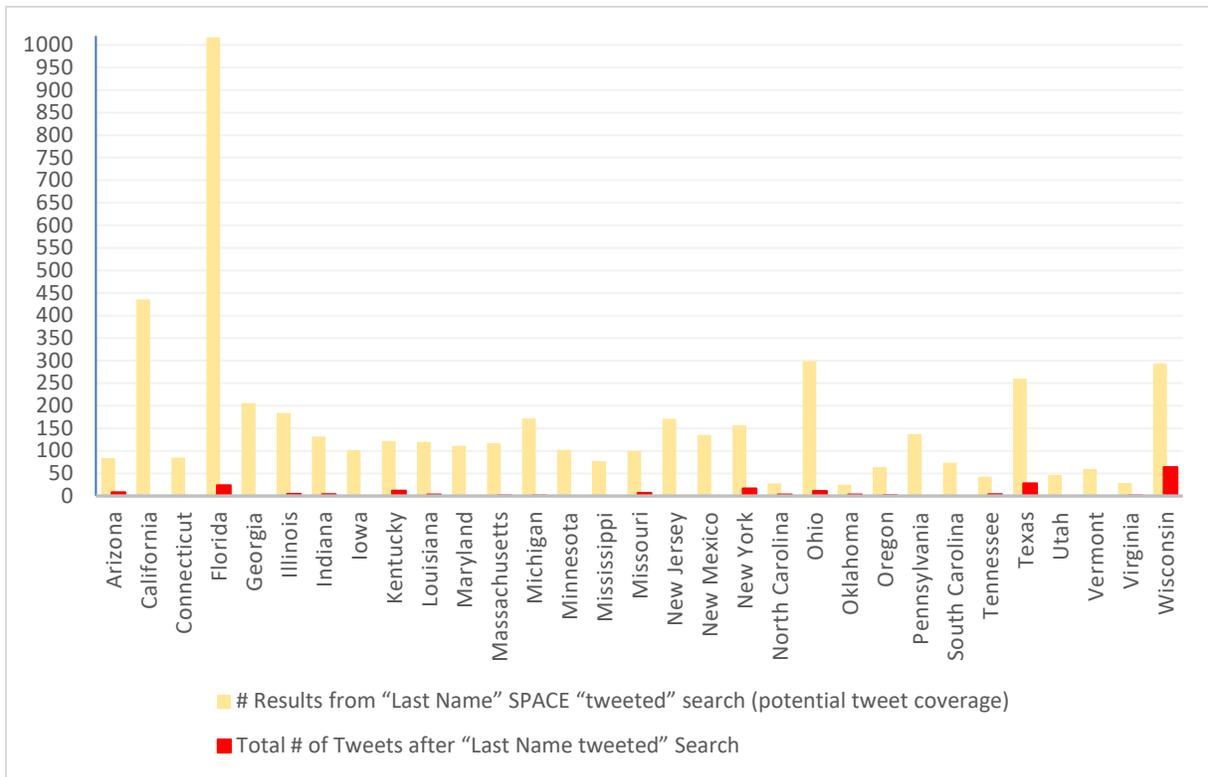
Figure 1.1. 2017 Gubernatorial Tweet Coverage

tweets from their overall tweet count for 2017 referenced or directly quoted in state newspaper

coverage, and Figure 1 shows just how sparingly governors' tweets are being used in newspaper

coverage. Therefore, state journalists' adoption of Twitter for covering governors' tweet is still

generally, a new practice. Based on the tweets accumulated via my data collection, governors

used Twitter as a vehicle to explain policy measures, provide updates or alerts, or offer general

commentary on a variety of topics. Many of the tweets that were utilized in state political

coverage addressed the following topics: condolences to the families of first responders (police,

firefighters, EMS), political officials, and other various constituents; funding and announcements

regarding natural disasters; state policy initiatives such as education, trade, infrastructure and the

states' budgets; national politics such as healthcare, immigration, infrastructure, and Supreme

Court nominees; and current political events or hot-button issues, such as the removal of Confederate monuments and gun control, especially as a result of the Las Vegas Mandalay Bay shooting.

Although state political journalists' adoption of Twitter for covering governors' tweets is relatively minimal, the next study will further our understanding of how political leaders and media are adopting Twitter to offer and consume knowledge about state political activities. As found in Project 1, Twitter's ability to serve as an explanatory and informative communication tool is also apparent in Project 2. My case study of Kentucky's 2018 General Legislative Assembly hashtag aims to answer who used #kyga18 most frequently and who were the most influential users of the hashtag?

**PROJECT 2**

Studying state politicians' and journalists' relationship with Twitter is important because as I found in Project 1, it highlights the shortcomings of journalists' "sparing and selective" use of Twitter despite it being "a rich arsenal for journalists in search of quotes from prominent news sources like politicians." (Wallsten, 2015, p.37; Broersma and Graham, 2012, p. 407) However, it is also important to study the extent to which state politicians and journalists are using Twitter to interact with one another and the public. Twitter serves as a platform where content can be provided and explained in a very direct format—140 characters is all politicians and journalists have to work with to convey a message. This case study demonstrates the importance of tweets as relational currency between state-level media and political institutions, and the impact they have on the public, their state residents on Twitter, and their overall state political environment. To demonstrate the importance of state-level media and political institutions' effects on constituents' livelihoods, Project 2 studies Kentucky's pension crisis before and after the contentious, 2018 Legislative Session. Sandwiched between the South and Midwest, and having the 26th largest state population in the United States, Kentucky is an "average" state to observe (United States Census Bureau). As it relates to technology and therefore potential social media access, Kentucky's broadband availability is comparable to the national average—94.12% of population with two or more providers and 72.57% with three or more providers— with broadband availability reaching 94.03% and 64.25% of the state's population respectively (Federal Communications Commission, 2017). As the case study shows, Kentucky politicians', journalists' and constituents' communication on Twitter affected policy discussions related to the crisis and furthermore impacted the state's overall political environment. Politicians', journalists' and constituents' conversations and reactions regarding the crisis' policymaking process took

form via retweets, replies, and mentions. By measuring and analyzing these Twitter-units, I provide evidence regarding the extent to which Twitter facilitates communication amongst various stakeholder groups and how this communication affects state residents' daily lives through policy.

**Context of Recent Kentucky Pension Reform**

Since its creation in 1956, Kentucky state employees have been promised a pension paid by the state government (Kentucky Retirement Systems website, 2017). Divided amongst several different plans, teachers, transportation and infrastructure personnel, law enforcement, even the folks who staff the state's legislators, rely on payments and benefits that are monitored and addressed by policy and state officials. As Project 2 describes at length, when Kentucky officials' attempts at pension reform in 2018 were met with resistance, multiple stakeholders (many of which are connected to state government) experienced consequences from the resistance. For example, Governor Bevin experienced major backlash from current and former retirees regarding his "Keeping the Promise" proposal and several of his comments towards Kentucky teachers. As Kentucky teachers chose to go on strike and close down Kentucky schools as a response to pension reform, the closures sparked heated discussion from all political viewpoints. Teachers emphasized they are not just babysitters—they are dedicated educators. Governor Bevin, questioned teachers' dedication by saying Kentucky children were likely abused while left at home due to teachers' strikes and schools' closures (McLaren and Aulbach, 2018).

Overall, tensions surrounding Kentucky pension reform were very high before, during, and after the 2018 Kentucky legislative session. But stepping back from the partisan and political commentary, the frustration behind these comments does inherently come from constituents'

fundamental feelings about state government's involvement in their daily lives. Kentuckians found that their teachers do take on a great challenge of teaching our youth and prepping them for work and life ahead. Although this thought may not have crossed every Kentucky parents' mind, it sure crossed other parents' as they had to find a babysitter, take their kid to work, or miss a day of work due to school closures. The teachers' protests showed just how influential state government can be in one person's life (adjusting a teacher's or state worker's pension) and the impact it can have on someone else's life (children, parents, employers, workforce, etc.) Political and media institutions' communication drive the processes of democracy, legislative action, and political engagement.

It is important to note that Kentucky legislators also did not escape criticism for their handling of the reform process. As the following sections will describe, political maneuvers to pass the pension legislation were also contentious. What we gain from my study of Kentucky's 2018 pension reform process is an understanding how Kentucky policymakers', media personal, and other stakeholders' usage of Twitter streamlined communication between each group. Additionally, it informs us how each of these groups used the social media platform to explain the complex process and piece of legislation that affects the lives of many current and retired state employees, as well as those who will be hired in the future.

**Kentucky's 2018 Pension Reform Process**

Project 2 analyzes at the power of politicians' and journalists' Twitter usage before and during Kentucky's 2018 General Assembly. On October 18, 2017, prior to Session convening, Governor Matt Bevin-R, House Speaker Jeff Hoover-R, and Senate President Robert Stivers-R announced the GOP's approach to their top legislative issue: pension reform (Maglinger, 2017; Novelly, 2017). Kentucky's crippling unfunded liabilities served as the catalyst for this reform.

Unfunded liabilities are the monetary and benefit obligations (debts) that state governments are unable to pay its employees due to insufficient state funds (Thune, 2018). As of June 30, 2016, Kentucky has accumulated between $33 and 82 billion dollars in unfunded liabilities (Overview, pensions.ky.gov).

In an effort to reduce the unfunded liabilities, Gov. Matt Bevin proposed several changes he wanted Kentucky legislators to implement in their reform legislation. His eight-page, "Keeping the Promise" proposal (2017) was summarized into these ten points:

1. "Keeping the Promise" will save Kentucky's pension systems and meet the legal and moral obligations owed to current and retired teachers and public servants
2. Requires full payment of ARC and creates a new funding formula that mandates hundreds of millions more in every retirement plan, making them healthier and solvent sooner
3. For those still working: no increase to the full retirement age, and current defined benefits remain in place until the employee reaches the promised level of unreduced pension benefit
4. For those retired: no clawbacks or reductions to pension checks, and healthcare benefits are protected
5. For future non-hazardous employees and teachers: enrollment in a defined contribution retirement plan will provide comparable retirement benefits
6. For current and future hazardous employees: will continue in the same system they are in now
7. Closes loophole to ensure payment of death benefits for the families of hazardous employees
8. Stops defined benefit plans for all legislators, moving them into the same defined contribution plan as other state employees under the jurisdiction of the KRS Board
9. No emergency clause: law will not go into effect until July 1, 2018
10. Structural changes should improve the Commonwealth's rating with credit agencies, which have downgraded Kentucky's rating, citing unfunded pension burdens

Overall, the proposal recommended 52, bullet-point changes that Gov. Bevin wished to see made to Kentucky's retirement systems. These changes would affect the eight different pension plans that make up Kentucky's three major retirement systems (Overview, pensions.ky.gov). They are as follows:

- Kentucky Retirement System
  - Kentucky Employees Retirement System -- Hazardous (KERS-HAZ)

- o Kentucky Employees Retirement System-- Non-Hazardous (KERS-NH)
- o County Employees Retirement System -- Hazardous (CERS-HAZ)
- o County Employees Retirement System -- Non-Hazardous (CERS-NH)
- o State Police Retirement System -- (SPRS)
- Teachers' Retirement System of Kentucky -- (TRS or also known as KTRS)
- Kentucky Judicial Form Retirement System (KJFRS)
  - o Kentucky Legislators' Retirement Plan (KLRP)
  - o Kentucky Judicial Retirement Panel (KJRP)

Some of these changes included "[Capped] sick leave to sick leave balance accrued on June 30, 2018. Sick leave credit no longer used to determine retirement eligibility effective retirements on or after July 1, 2018" for the KERS-NH/HAZ and CERS-NH/HAZ plans and "Future cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for current retirees temporarily suspended for five years," and "COLAs for future retirees will begin after five years in retirement" for the KTRS plan (Keeping the Promise, 2017).

Reactions to the "Keeping the Promise" proposal varied amongst Kentucky residents. Some individuals commended the governor and legislators for finally addressing the failing systems. Former KRS manager George Avin said, "We are fortunate to have a governor who knows finance and is willing to find a solution. His leadership toward pension reform is a great beginning for building a brighter financial future for Kentucky." (Bevin, 2017) Kentucky resident Dalton Workman tweeted, "@RepHarrisKY said he will be a no vote on #KeepingThePromise. Not a surprise," with an image of a male's dress shoe kicking a can down the road, attached (Workman, 2017). Other residents, however, expressed great frustration or nervousness at the suggestion that their promised, inviolable contracts would be broken (Loftus, 2017). In response to Bevin's October 20, 2017 tweet stating, "'Keeping the Promise' meets legal and moral obligations owed to retired teachers and public servants…" retired Kenton County teacher, and former Kenton County Education Association president, Dottie Miller, replied directly to Bevin's tweet with a series of tweets saying, "TRS has calculated that your

method of saving my pension will cost me about $71,000…That feels like a new tax on this retired teacher… I already paid my required contribution to TRS. Now it is the state's turn." (Miller, 2017) In an interview, Det. Chris Jaskowiak of the Alexandria Police Department feared he would have to decide if he could continue working with the force (McKee, 2017). He mentioned his need to consider what is financially beneficial for he and his family (McKee, 2017).

Although the governor's proposal seemed to provide straight-forward explanations of his proposed changes, many Kentucky residents were left asking questions. As discussed in the literature review, a complex topic such as Kentucky's pension system calls for explanations from both policymakers and media personnel. With eight different plans, and three different systems, Kentucky residents rely on interest groups, legislators, and the media to explain the proposal's effects. Current and former state employees depend on these explanations as they need to know how this proposal would affect their daily lives and retirement. In this study, I analyze the conversation on Twitter regarding Kentucky's pension crisis and 2018 legislative process. The results highlight Twitter's influence as a communication medium for sharing political explanations via tweets. An analysis of the legislative hashtag—#kyga18—will generate a better understanding of the adoption of Twitter by media and political officials during Kentucky's contentious state political environment, and demonstrate how it influenced explanation-style communication with state residents and current, former, and future state employees (Lyons et al., 2013).

**Legislative Activity Regarding Pension Crisis**

Some components of the "Keeping the Promise" proposal appeared in the language of the official pension bill, Senate Bill 1. For example, summary point Number 3 in the list above was

adopted stating that current state workers in defined benefit plans would stay in them (Wymer, 2018). The Senate, however, chose to eliminate some of the most controversial parts of Bevin's proposal, such as mandating teachers and other state workers to enroll in a "401(k)-style plan and... pay an extra three percent for a retiree health benefit." (Wymer, 2018) Following an actuarial analysis, other legislative processes, and significant constituent protest (described in the literature review), Senate Bill 1 ultimately could not make it out of the chamber and into the Kentucky House of Representatives (KY Legislative Research Commission, 2018a). Despite its failure, Senate Bill 1 did not disappear from all legislative activity. Later in the Session, political mayhem over the bill erupted.

On March 29, 2018, the House State Government committee unexpectedly convened to vote on Senate Bill 151, an act related to the local provision of wastewater services (Bowling, 2018; TreesOnTheBeach, 2018). This bill had already received two readings and needed a State Government committee vote in order to send the bill to the Rules committee for scheduling its appearance on the House floor (Bowling, 2018; KY Legislative Research Commission, 2018a). Unbeknownst to several of the committee members, a new House Committee Substitute and committee amendment were drafted and awaiting a vote to be added to Senate Bill 151 (TreesOnTheBeach, 2018). As members of the committee received and thumbed through the draft, Kentucky Attorney General Andy Beshear said they realized "what was once an 11-page sewage bill, became a 291-page pension bill" that implemented parts of Senate Bill 1 with minor revisions (Bowling, 2018; TreesOnTheBeach, 2018). Hesitant to pass a bill of that size without a statute-required, 24-hour read-through period and an attached actuarial analysis, many committee members expressed frustration and disapproval of passing the bill out of committee (Bowling, 2018; TreesOnTheBeach, 2018). Nonetheless, the new Senate Bill 151 reported favorably out of

committee and made its way through the Rules committee and onto the House floor for a vote (KY Legislative Research Committee, 2018b). Following the House's 49-46 passage of the bill, Senate Bill 151 was sent back to the Senate for a vote (KY Legislative Research Committee, 2018b). The Senate passed the new, Senate Bill 151—with House Committee Substitute and committee amendment—with a 22-15 vote (KY Legislative Research Committee, 2018b). The Senate President, Robert Stivers, signed the bill and sent it off to Governor Bevin for signature.

The legislative actions of both chambers sent shockwaves through Kentucky's constituency. Again, while some residents were pleased that attempts to prevent the crisis from further destruction prevailed, others were upset with the questionable legislative approval process. With the help of AI-powered consumer insights company, Crimson Hexagon, data regarding the use of the 2018 Kentucky legislative hashtag—#kyga18—will indicate the extent to which media and policymakers adopted Twitter during this contentious session in order to explain the effects the new pension legislation would have on current and former Kentucky state employees (Crimson Hexagon, 2018).

**Methodology**

Crimson Hexagon is a data analytics tool that allows brands to gather consumer insight from social media, online public data, and enterprise data (Crimson Hexagon, 2018). Their primary tool, ForSight, allows researchers to conduct two different monitors to collect data: buzz or opinion monitors. Buzz monitors collect data based on "single sets of keywords, content sources, date ranges, and filters." (Huddy, 2017) Opinion monitors require developing a coding algorithm in addition to collecting keywords, content sources, etc. (Huddy, 2017).

Because this piece is looking at usage of the #kyga18 hashtag, a buzz monitor served as the best tool for collecting data. To create the monitor, a content source needed to be selected.

Since Twitter is the platform of interest, this source was chosen. #kyga18 served as the keyword, and the date range for collection was set from October 18, 2017—the day Governor Bevin's "Keeping the Promise" proposal launched— until Sine Die on April 14, 2018, also known as the adjournment of Kentucky's 2018 Legislative Session. After collecting the data, I analyzed several different types of descriptive data pieces. To avoid confusion, Crimson Hexagon's unit of measure is in "Posts," even though on Twitter, posts are known as tweets. For accuracy of reporting the data, tweets will be synonymous with posts.

**Results**

Overall, there were 79,477 posts that used #kyga18 during the date range I selected. Over time, posts including the hashtag increased by 712%. It is clear from Figure 2 that as Session came closer to an end, and as pension reform became more divisive, an increase in post volume occurred. As evident in Figure 2, the biggest spike in total posts per day occurred on March 30, 2018. This is the day that followed the committee meeting and Kentucky Legislature's passage of the new pension reform bill, Senate Bill 151.
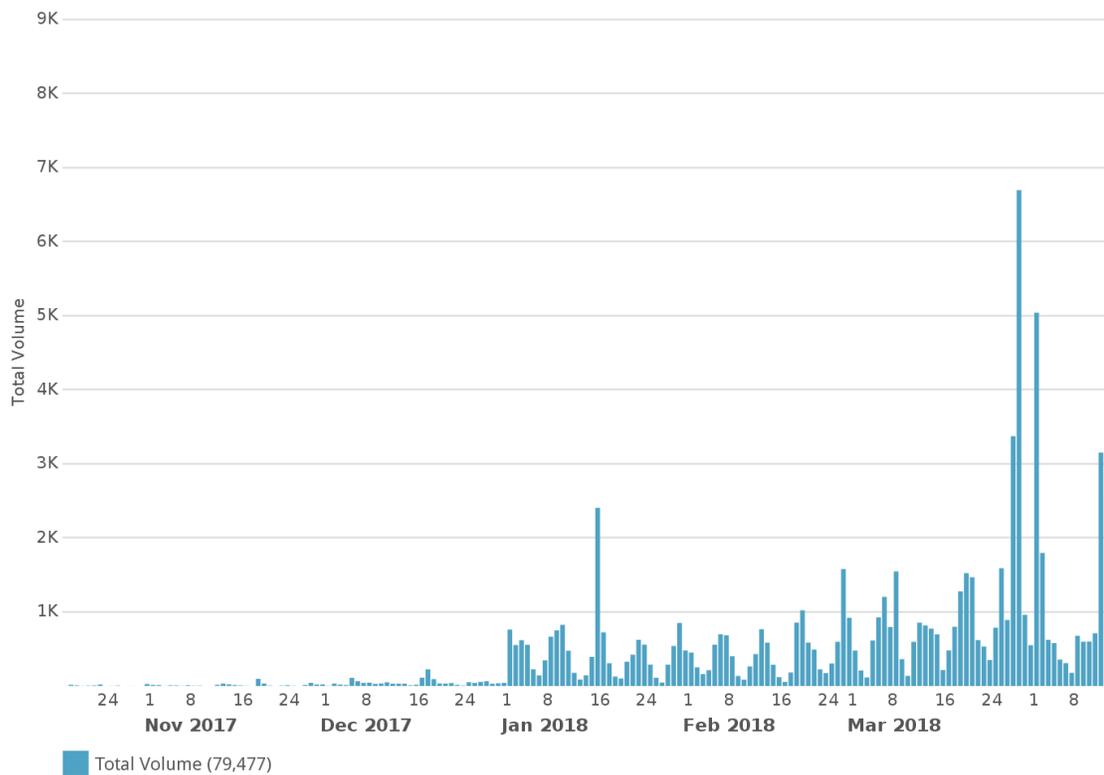
Figure 2.1. Volume of #kyga18 tweets from 10/18/17 to 4/14/18

To answer my primary research question, who used #kyga18 the most, Crimson Hexagon identified the Most Prolific Twitter accounts who used the legislative hashtag. This measure is defined as "the top 10 unique Twitter authors by volume of tweets related to a given topic. These are the most active authors in a conversation over a particular time period, regardless of their influence score." After looking at the Twitter accounts and identifying who the accounts belong to, I categorized the authors into the following groups: party affiliations, activists, media, organizations and centers.

Table 2.1. Twitter Account Categorizations

| Twitter Handle | # of Tweets with #kyga18 | Author Affiliation |
|---|---|---|
| @KYSenateGOP | 1,148 | Political Party Affiliation |
| @KYSenateDems | 1,097 | Political Party Affiliation |
| @GoGoGoing | 819 | Activist (Left) |
| @phillipmbailey | 777 | Media |
| @matttalley413 | 732 | Activist (Left) |
| @KYHouseDems | 598 | Political Party Affiliation |
| @KYLeagueCities | 532 | Organization |
| @ACLUofKY | 525 | Organization |
| @KyPolicy | 506 | Center |
| @Mom1234567890 | 433 | Unknown, likely Activist (Left) |

As Table 2 shows, political party affiliations, particularly the legislative caucuses, were the most active users of #kyga18. Although individual politicians were not highlighted in this group, I am encouraged to know that the social media that reflects the legislative caucuses and the Body as a whole, are adopting Twitter and the legislative hashtag as tools to inform the public about important, impactful state political operations. Media personnel, unfortunately, did not produce high volumes of tweets using #kyga18. The one media individual, Phillip M. Bailey, is a metro government reporter for Kentucky's *Courier-Journal*. Based on this observation, Kentucky's media can improve their adoption of the legislative hashtag in their tweets during Session. Activists and advocacy groups/organizations have a sizeable hashtag and post

frequency, meaning they are models for politicians and media members to follow to optimize

communication between the institutions themselves and the public.

Another data measure Crimson Hexagon provided was the Most Influential Twitter

Authors. Each author is rated based on an influencer score, where they may not be the ones using

the hashtag or tweeting the most, but their influence and their relationship to the topic is

prominent to the topic's overall discussion. Scores that are numerically higher in value represent

more influence. These scores are likely determined by a measure calculated by Klout, a social

media analytics website that rates individuals' social influence on a scale of 1 to 100 (Huddy,

2017). In addition to coding those who utilized the hashtag the most, I coded the top 50 most

influential Twitter authors to see how media and political institutions faired amongst other users.

Each author was placed into one of the following eight categories: Legislators, state political

officials, media, advocacy groups/organizations, policy centers and staff, party affiliations,

activists, and constituents. Table 3 provides descriptions reflecting the author-makeup of each

category:

Table 2.2. Author-Makeup Categories

| |
|---|
| Legislators: Elected KY House and Senate members |
| State Political Officials: Governor, Secretary of State, state department heads, etc. |
| Media: Newspaper and television journalists, broadcast personnel |
| Advocacy Groups/Organizations: Non-profits, lobbying firms, coalitions, associations |
| Policy Centers and Staff: Research entities and their staff members |
| Party Affiliations: Legislative caucuses and state party affiliations |
| Activists: Self-proclaimed activists or highly, politically engaged people |
| Constituents: Not a self-proclaimed activist, but engaged in recent political issues; general Kentucky residents |

Of the 50 authors, 28 percent were legislators, 6 percent were state political officials, 14 percent

were media representatives, 28 percent were advocacy groups and organizations, 4 percent were

policy centers and staff, 12 percent were party affiliations, 6 percent were activists, and 2 percent were constituents.

Based on these results, the top three most influential authors using #kyga18 were legislators (28%), advocacy groups and organizations (28%), and media (14%). Although he was coded as a state political official, Governor Matt Bevin was the most influential author, maintaining a 5.4 influencer score. The top legislator was Damon Thayer, Kentucky's Senate Majority Floor Leader. The ACLU of Kentucky was the top advocacy group with an influencer score of 1.7. In addition to being a prolific #kyga18 user, Phillip M. Bailey, metro government reporter for Kentucky's *Courier-Journal*, was also the top media influencer with a score of 2.1. An interesting find while coding was that Kentucky Secretary of State, Alison Lundergan Grimes, had two accounts listed as most influential. One account seems to be her official Secretary of State Twitter feed, and the other appears to be a more personal, potentially candidate-like feed. Although Secretary Grimes just missed the top 10 for most influential Twitter author (number 11), she had the second most retweeted tweet during the October 18, 2017 to April 14, 2018 timeframe. On March 29, 2018, Secretary Grimes tweeted the following:
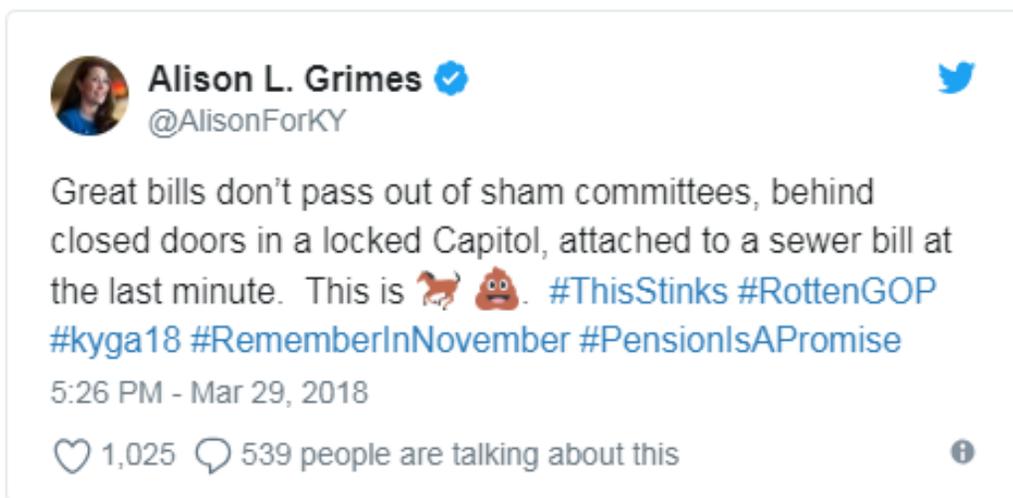


Figure 2.2. Alison Grimes Tweet

According to Crimson Hexagon, this tweet was retweeted over 440 times during October 18, 2017 and April 14, 2018. With this tweet alone, Secretary Grimes generated a major connection with a variety of stakeholder groups, likely with a variety of opinions either supporting or criticizing her tweet. Her adoption of Twitter and the power she has exuded connecting with other institutional members and the public through tweets, is critical and something to be modeled by other state officials and media.

**Discussion**

In this study, state political officials and media comprised the entire top 10 Most Prolific Authors and Most Influential Authors' lists. Because these institutions' fundamental responsibilities are to work with one another to streamline communication between the themselves and furthermore the public, it is encouraging to know that journalists and politicians are using Twitter to accomplish this task. Secretary Grimes' tweet is a perfect example of politicians' tweets providing insider perspectives in hopes of receiving coverage to explain or alert the public about complex and life-changing policy and their processes. Grimes' tweet and Twitter presence serves as an additional contribution to local newspaper, television and radio coverage of Kentucky state politics. Because state politics has seen a decrease in coverage in local newspapers, this study exemplifies Twitter's supplemental support for state political and media institutions to inform the public about critical policy measures. Although Kentucky residents are not engaging significantly with Twitter to the point they the most influential or prolific Twitter users, at least we—politicians, media, and researchers— have a basic understanding of their level of engagement. Without this case study, we would not know the quantified extent to which Kentucky policymakers, media personnel, and constituents used Twitter to explain, educate, and communicate reactions to the 2018 pension reform process.

**CONCLUSION**

After conducting these two projects, we have gathered a basic understanding of the extent to which Twitter has influenced state-level political and media institutions. Project 1 demonstrates journalists' minimal use of governors' tweet, as well as their limited attempts to cover a variety of tweets over an extended period. Overall, governors may be using Twitter more often as a communication tool, but journalists are not using it frequently to cover governors' tweets. There are some limitations to my data and conclusions because this study is exploring a minimally-researched topic. This study in particular only looks at one form of journalistic reference to tweets: "Last name tweeted." Not captured are the possible writing variations such as "in a tweet" or "said on Twitter" among others. Newspapers.com is best for large data collection and is not a very sophisticated search engine like Access World News/NewsBank or LexisNexis, these potential uses of or references to governors' tweets have gone unreported. My study, however, can serve as a baseline for further research to be conducted to find a more conclusive representation of governors' tweets in state and local newspapers.

Project 2 highlights politicians' and media personnel's Twitter usage and how they contributed to one state's political conversations through tweets by explaining important legislation that impacted Kentucky residents' daily lives. Although Kentucky politicians and journalists were not the most active users of the #kyga18 hashtag, they were among the most influential authors that used the legislative hashtag. Regardless of their limited use of the #kyga18 hashtag, it is clear that Kentucky politicians used Twitter to communicate important policy information and commentary about critical and impactful Kentucky legislation during the 2018 Legislative Session.

Researching state political and media institutions' adoption of social media should continue to be conducted to further understand their relationship, and how it may change over time. Further studies about Twitter's role in state political discussions can serve as encouragement to state politicians, media, and constituents to adopt Twitter in order to become politically informed and engaged about state operations and life-impacting legislation. State political and media institutions cannot exist as one without the other, and research analyzing their interactions with the public via social media is a next best step to developing this collection of literature. Collectively understanding every state's political and media institution dynamics would be ideal in determining just how influential these institutions are in their state's political environments, especially regarding their state's individual policy needs.

Going forward, understanding the public's adoption of Twitter and their interaction with these institutions on Twitter is another important endeavor to complete. As current literature has already presented, and to some degree was shown in Project 2's results, Twitter is not utilized by everyone in the constituency (Greenburg, 2014). Twitter users are very much the people who are already politically engaged, are advocates and activists in some way, and are political knowledgeable on at least one or more important issues in their lives. Understanding the three-way interaction between state politicians, media, and constituents on social media could provide important feedback as to how their interactions are politically affecting our everyday lives. Current research has shown how national political and media institutions interact, share news, and explain policy via social media. We see coverage nearly every day regarding President Trump's, other Congressional members', or national Department-heads' tweets. Observing state political and media institutions' explanations and news via tweets must now become the focus of social media and institutional research. Until this research is conducted, we at least have an

introductory-level understanding about state political and media institutions' relationship through

their adoption and usage of Twitter.

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**VITA**

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