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# Political Journalists Tweet About the Final 2016 Presidential Debate

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Political Journalists Tweet About the Final 2016 Presidential Debate

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by

Hannah Hopper

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ABSTRACT


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Past research shows that journalists are gatekeepers to information the public seeks. Using the gatekeeping and agenda-setting theory, this study used a content analysis of tweets from political journalists during the final 2016 presidential debate to examine social media usage in efforts to convey information to followers and whether social media has allowed for journalists to present a more transparent view of candidates to the public. This study used feminist political theory to further analyze whether the tweets from political journalists portrayed Hillary Clinton, the female candidate, with stereotypical "female" traits, such as more emotional and more trustworthy. Applying these theories, this study found that political journalists use social media for personal uses and when discussing politics are still gatekeepers of information. When the debates were discussed, the study demonstrates there was little discussion via tweets of gendered traits and issues in regards to Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

DEDICATION

*You make me happy when skies are gray.*

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Melissa Hopper and Doug Hopper. I am beyond thankful for the love, encouragement, and support you have both provided for me throughout this process. Your dedication to my education has driven me to work harder in all I do. Words will never be able to summarize how thankful I am to have you as my parents. I love you both to the moon and back and bigger than the sky.

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I will never be able to say it enough, but I will always try: thank you all.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 presidential election is historical for many reasons, one being that it was the first time in history that a female candidate won the nomination of a major political party. Females are widely underrepresented in politics with less than 20% of United States Congressional leaders being female in a nation where over 50% of the population is female (CAWP, 2018). Many researchers have studied the representation of female candidates and politicians in media over the years. With the rise of social media and the increase of journalists using social media to share information, there becomes an interest to researchers on if changes in how female candidate and their appearance, issues platforms, and traits have changed. Using studies on the representation of female candidates by journalists (Waters, Dudash-Buskirk, & Pipan, 2018) and on how journalists are using social media to share their work, gather information for stories, and even share personal opinions (Lawrence, Molyneux, Coddington, & Holton, 2014) as models, this thesis aims to discover if political journalists on Twitter discussed Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in similar lights or if gender bias was present.

Framing, Agenda Setting, and Gatekeeping theories in mass communication research suggest that journalists have the ability to select the stories shared with the public and how they are framed. These theories all influence how the general public views news and information. The rise of the Internet created unique opportunities for these theories. Framing, agenda setting, and gatekeeping all rely on someone else processing the information before it gets to the general public. Twitter and other social media platforms remove some of the barriers that were previously between politicians and the public. As noted by Evans, Brown, and Wimberly (2017),

Twitter (and other social media platforms) allow for politicians to bypass gatekeepers in traditional media.

A content analysis was conducted on a sample of tweets from political journalists during the days surrounding the final 2016 presidential debate. The journalists were divided into right leaning, left leaning, and centrist political affiliations through the use of StatSocial (2015), a program that identified the political leanings of journalists' followers and therefore the assumed leanings of the journalists. Using Lawrence et al.'s (2014) study as a base for the initial coding process, the researchers identified the types of tweets and content within the tweets. The secondary coding process used Waters et al.'s (2018) variables and codebook format to analyze the perceptions political journalists had of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the final days of the presidential election.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study builds on existing research on the use of social media by political journalists to discuss and share information about elections in the United States. It aims to discuss how political journalism is impacted by the casual nature of social media, specifically the use of Twitter during the final 2016 presidential debate.

**Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites, or social media, have been defined by scholars as websites and apps that allow people to create profiles where the users can build bases of other users and share information with those other users. In 2007, Boyd and Ellison (p. 211) defined social media specifically as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."

Over the past 20 years more than 100 social networking sites have been established across the globe (Mehra, 2017). The first social networking site was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In a 2014 article by Karen McIntyre, there is discussion about whether the start of the social media progression began in 1979 with UseNet or in 1971 with the first email. There is even a suggestion that a timeline for social media should include the beginnings of CompuServe in 1969 (McIntyre, 2014).

According to Pew Research Center, about 70% of Americans use social media (Social Media Fact Sheet, 2018). The use of social media varies most significantly by age. While 88% of those ages 18-29 use social media sites, only 37% of Americans 65 years of age or older use

social media. Other demographic variants for social media users have less variation. Income and education level have more of an impact on social media usage than race and gender with those who are wealthier and more educated using social media the most (Social Media Fact Sheet, 2018).

In a 2018 survey by Pew Research Center the researchers found that the most popular social media site was YouTube with 73% of American adults using the site. Facebook is used by 68% of adults, Instagram (35%), Pinterest (29%), and Twitter (24 %) (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

**Twitter**

Microblogging is a form of social media that is most well-known through Twitter. Twitter was founded in March 2006 to provide friends with quick updates that were no more than 140 characters. In a 2010 article it was noted that Twitter had a 1,382% increase year over year from 2006 to 2009 in users (Arceneaux & Schmitz Weiss). This growth has slowed down in more recent years with the most recent reports showing monthly active users growing only 4% year-over-year in 2017 (Wang, 2017).

The basic layout of Twitter is relatively simple. People set up an account and then can follow and be followed by other users. Users with some level of notoriety or celebrity receive verified accounts. These accounts have blue check mark badges by the user's name showing that the account is the authentic person or entity (About Verified Account, n.d.). Tweets can include photos, links, or videos, but are typically just text posts. These posts can include hashtags to make content on a single topic by multiple users easier to find. Users can reply or like tweets from other users or retweet tweets so they are shared with the user's followers (Burrell, 2017).

Twitter is, according to the site, "what's happening in the world and what people are talking about right now" (Twitter About, 2017). The platform allows for interactions from users

through posting and tagging other users in posts, replies to the posts, "retweets" or sharing of tweets from others to a user's personal timeline, and likes or marking tweets as favorites. Until November 2017 Twitter only allowed for 140 characters per tweet which meant that most tweets were short and to the point, but led to tweet threads, or multiple tweets from users posted in a row on the same topic. In 2017, Twitter started testing 280-character limits. They found that engagements (likes, retweets, and mentions) increased with longer tweet formats. The company rolled out the new change in November (Rosen, 2017).

According to Bloomberg news, "Twitter has been battling the perception that it's a niche media platform, despite its emergence as U.S. President Donald Trump's favorite communications tool" (Wang, 2017, para. 2). Twitter finds itself most useful when disasters strike. The short form communication style and use of hashtags create a social media environment that allows for news to be reported quickly. In the early days of Twitter, the platform received notable press attention for the reporting of the Sichuan province earthquake in China and the Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008 (Arceneaux & Schmitz Weiss, 2010).

**Journalists on Twitter**

The brief nature of Twitter's platform makes it an ideal place to share information as it is happening in the world. Whether it is being used by citizens to share details of daily life and newsworthy events or by celebrities to engage with fans, the brief communication style and hashtagging capabilities are appealing to Twitter's wide range of users. The largest base of users is journalists. In a 2015 study, the researchers found that in a sample of 15,000 verified accounts almost 25% were journalists (Mullin, 2015). Media outlets, such as news organizations, make up nearly 7% of verified accounts. Politicians and government/NGO accounts make up 3% and 6% of verified accounts respectively (Kamps, 2015).

Lawrence, et al. (2014) published a study about political journalists' use of Twitter during the 2012 presidential campaign. They found that political journalists tend to be more open with opinions and personal information on Twitter than on other media platforms. "Political journalists tended to use Twitter's orientation toward openness and personal expression to practice a somewhat more transparent form of campaign journalism that is less bound by the norm of objectivity" (Lawrence et al., 2014, p. 799). Studies on political journalists on Twitter suggest that they "hung on to objectivity, offering only a modicum of their own political opinions" (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017, p. 3).

In a 2017 study by Molyneux and Mourão studied the normalization of Twitter by political journalists. They found journalists tend to interact with other journalists more than others outside of their line of work. The researchers also found that journalists' followers regularly retweet tweets about policy issues, but not more humorous or personal tweets. Their colleagues on the other hand do interact with the personal or humorous tweets. This suggests that political journalists who are "seeking more audience engagement might consider a shift in focus away from humor as the lowest common-denominator content form and begin to focus on the policy issues people are interested in, at least during political events such as debates and elections" (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017, p. 15).

**Political Communication on Twitter.** In a recent Pew Research Institute study, researchers found that over one-third of social media users are tired of how many political posts they see on social media. The same study found 88% of Twitter users see at least some political related tweets and that almost 20% of politically engaged social media users discuss issues with others online (Duggan & Smith, 2016). While people may be tired of seeing political posts, studies show that social media is a key news source for many Americans. Out of all social media

platforms Twitter has the most users who look at news on the site. 59% of Twitter users get news from the site (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016).

Opinion leaders are an active source of political communication on Twitter. These leaders can be journalists, campaign employees, or even highly involved and interested private citizens. Katz and Lazersfeld (1955) defined opinion leaders as "the individuals who were likely to influence other persons in their immediate environment" (p. 3). Today's immediate environment is far larger than that of 1955. The Internet has allowed for a larger reach in who receives messages from whom. A journalist can tweet an article or message, the message can be shared by someone who is considered an opinion leader, and then that message is seen by a larger audience than the journalist's followers. In a 2013 study on opinion leadership, political engagement, and Twitter, researchers found that opinion leadership plays a significant role in rousing people to use Twitter (Park, 2013). The study also found that when a person's perceived opinion leadership is high, they are more likely to seek out information, mobilize people, and express their opinions publicly on Twitter. Through the study researchers found that opinion leaders on Twitter are highly engaged in political discussion and participation. These leaders have a high influence on people in the political process (Park, 2013). The result of the study "suggests that opinion leaders using Twitter may be playing a crucial role in encouraging individuals to participate in the public and political process" (Park, 2013, p. 1646).

Twitter has become the politician's social media of choice over the past few election cycles. In 2012 presidential candidates used Twitter to share where their campaign would be stopping next more than sharing their opinions on policy issues (Evans, Brown, Wimberly, 2017). Evans et al. looked beyond journalists and opinion leaders in their study of political communication on Twitter. The study consisted of a content analysis of every single tweet from

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Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton from July 1, 2016 through November 7, 2016, Election Day.

Their research found that Trump and Clinton sent a total of 3,363 tweets during the study

timeframe. 65% of those tweets came from Hillary Clinton's account (Evans et al., 2017).

Coding for types of tweets and whether the tweets discussed gendered political issues, Evans et

al. (2017) found that less than 6% of Trump's total tweets pertained to stereotypically "female"

political issues. On the other hand, Clinton's tweets about "female" political issues comprised

17.4% of her total tweets (Evans et al., 2017).

**Gender Roles in Journalism and Politics**

In a country where females make up over half of the population, there is significantly less

women in political roles than men. According to the Center for American Women in Politics

women make up less than 20% of the seats in the United States Congress and just over 22% of

statewide elected executive officials (CAWP, 2018). The 2016 presidential election was unique

for many reasons, one of those being that for the first time in history both major political parties

and a third party had females vying for the nomination and election (Dittmar, 2017). While the

United States has not had a female president yet, that does not mean that there have not been

brave women in history who have vied for the office. In 1872, almost 50 years before women

received the right to vote, Victoria Woodhull became the first woman to run for president

(Dittmar, 2017). Nearly a century later Margaret Chase Smith became the first woman whose

name was placed in nomination at a political party convention. After Smith came Shirley

Chisholm, the first woman to receive votes form delegates at the Democratic convention in 1972

(Dittmar, 2017). Many other women sought out Republican and Democratic nominations over

the years, but none were as successful as Hillary Clinton in 2008. That was the same year that

Sarah Palin was placed on the Republican ballot, the second woman in history to be placed on a major party ballot Dittmar, 2017).

In a report on gender in the 2016 election it was noted that Carly Fiorina, the female Republican hopeful, and Hillary Clinton were criticized for appearing harsh and not smiling enough. Their male competitors were rarely criticized for their smiling or lack thereof (Dittmar, 2017). The female candidates receive more attention to their personal lives than male candidates by the press and public. Carlin and Winfrey (2009) found that the press focused on Clinton and Palin's appearance more during the 2008 presidential election than the media did for male candidates. Media framed Clinton and Palin as selfish when they used their children in their political campaigns and raised questions on their abilities as mothers (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). Studies have also shown that Clinton's tears in 2008 were considered authentic and sensitive, while when past male candidates cried publicly they were portrayed as weak or temperamental by the media (Shepard, 2009).

**Gendered traits.** Research into "female" and "male" traits has been an aspect of females running for political office for decades. Huddy and Terkildsen (2001) found that:

Typical female traits such as warmth, sensitivity and compassion were thought to qualify female candidates for dealing better with compassion issues, such as education, health care, and the problems of the poor and aged. Assertiveness, aggressiveness, and self-confidence, typical male traits, were thought to aid male candidates in coping better with military or police crises. Candidates with typical masculine traits were also perceived as more competent to handle economic issues. (p.140)

As Waters et al. (2018) notes, "Voters at times rely on personality trait assessment to help make a decision on whom to vote for" (p. 8). Their study found that Wendy Davis, the female

2014 Texas gubernatorial candidate, was perceived as more emotional, trustworthy, and with more understanding of perceived domestic issues. Davis's male opposition, Greg Abbott, was perceived as more knowledgeable about immigration and infrastructure and less emotional than Davis (Waters et al., 2018).

**Theories**

This study is an expansion on two previous studies. The first study, *Tweeting Conventions: Political journalists' use of Twitter to cover the 2012 presidential campaign,* used gatekeeping as the primary theory. The study found that while journalists use Twitter to open up beyond politics, they reinforced their gatekeeping roles in some regards (Lawrence et al., 2014). The second study, *Battleground Texas: Gendered Media Framing of the 2014 Texas Gubernatorial Race*, used feminist political theory and gatekeeping as primary theories in the research on whether newspaper articles covering the 2014 Texas election were gendered in their coverage (Waters et al., 2018). This study aims to also discover whether there is a polarization effect in who chooses to follow specific political journalists on Twitter.

**Gatekeeping.** In *Tweeting Conventions* by Lawrence et al. (2014) the researchers used gatekeeping theory as the basis of their study on how journalists use Twitter. Gatekeeping is the process of selecting what information to share with an audience, when to share it, and how the information is positioned (Shoemaker, Vos, & Reese, 2009). Journalists are well established in literature as gatekeepers of information for the public. The changing face of journalism over the past decades has resulted in an increased focus on defining who gatekeepers are. A 2007 study resolutely states gatekeepers are professionals within news organizations, "those who have editorial responsibility… including full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, news people, and editors" (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007, p. 3). Research on

gatekeeping has noted that there is little difference on the gender of the gatekeeper on the information that is allowed through the gate (Shoemaker et al., 2009). The gatekeeping function of journalism is in a unique place with the growth of the Internet. Internet users can now create their own content and be their own gatekeepers, which calls to question the source of journalists as gatekeepers (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). There is a divide between modern scholars on whether gatekeeping is still in the hands of journalists. As "studies suggest that the gate and the gatekeeper role neither remain intact nor are fully replaced but have become a hinge between tradition and change" (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009, p. 572). Using Lawrence et al. (2014) as a model for the research, the first research questions are proposed:

RQ1: Are political journalists using Twitter to share links to their work, colleague's works, other news outlets, or non-journalistic works?

RQ2: To what degree are political journalists using Twitter to retweet the work or ideas of fellow journalists?

RQ3: To what degree are journalists using Twitter to gather information from their followers for story ideas, examples, historical facts, etc.?

RQ4: To what degree are political journalists using Twitter to share information regarding their daily work or working conditions?

RQ5: To what degree do political journalists' tweets focus on the election strategy, personal characteristics, or policy issues?

RQ6: To what degree do political journalists use Twitter to share opinions, personal information, or conduct conversations with other users?

RQ7: To what degree do political journalists use Twitter to fact-checking of political candidates?

**Agenda Setting and Framing.** Agenda setting, priming, and framing are three separate communication theories that have often been combined into a single theoretical framework. Scheufele (2000) noted the three theories are "related, yet different approaches to media effects that cannot be combined into a simple theory just for the sake of parsimony" (p. 298). These theories have all been studied through the lens of political communication. In an article from Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) the authors dissect the evolution of three communication theories that have become staples in political communication: agenda setting, framing, and priming.

Both agenda setting and priming are based on the premise of salience. Agenda setting is famously connected with the quote from Cohen (1963) that /;   (p. 13). Walter Lippmann introduced the idea of agenda setting in his 1922 book, *Public Opinion.* The phrase "agenda setting" wasn't used, but the basic principles of the media being the connection between major events and the minds of the public was outlined. McCombs and Shaw were the first to set the "agenda setting" in the 1970s. "Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audience" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). Priming is the theory that mass media influence "the standards in which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63). Priming "occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments. It is often understood as an extension of agenda setting" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11).

Framing, as noted by Waters et al. (2018), looks at how media creates "a certain style, persona, or perspective for a story" (p. 2). Framing is based on the premise of attribution

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(Scheufele, 2000). Framing emerged in the 1990s as a "communication tool for modern campaigns" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 10). The idea of framing wasn't new to politics, but Frank Luntz's authored a memo called "Language of the 21st century" in 1997. He used his research terms and phrases in Republican campaign messages to show select members of U.S. Congress that "the effect of the messages was not a function of content differences but of difference in the modes of presentation" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 57). Not long after Luntz's memo, the Democratic party had their own version of a message framing manual called *Don't Think of an Elephant* by George Lakoff.

**Feminist Political Theory.** "Feminist Political Theory is a rather sprawling theoretical position that intertwines sociological and philosophical perspectives and applies them to the study of campaigns, policy, voting, and the general structure of what Americans call politics" (Waters et al., 2018, in press, p. 1). Feminist political theory recognizes that political theory has historically been written by men for men and seeks to highlight that women are central to the political process (Bryson, 2016). The theory is broad and overarching meaning that disagreements by academics is prevalent in the research. The focus of the theory is female involvement in the political process, but how to get there and what it requires are large questions with many strategies (Bryson, 2016). Waters et al. (2018) notes that framing is an essential part of feminist political theory in terms of media and journalism. "Women-as-speakers are presented to voters differently than men who are already assumed to take on that role" (Waters et al., 2018, in press, p. 6). A deeper understanding of framing, agenda setting, and feminist political theory presents the next hypotheses in this study:

H1a: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Hillary Clinton's stereotypically "female" traits in her presidential race than her stereotypically "male" traits.

H1b: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Donald Trump's stereotypically "male" traits in his presidential race than his stereotypically "female" traits.

H2: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of stereotypically "female" issues versus "male" issues in regards to Hillary Clinton's presidential and stereotypically "male" issues in regards to Donald Trump's campaign.

H3: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Hillary Clinton's appearance than of Donald Trump's appearance.

**Political Polarization.** Political polarization is described by Pew Research Center as "the vast and growing gap between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats" ("Political Polarization," 2016, para. 1). Polarization isn't a new aspect of American political dialogue, but it has received increased attention in American politics in recent years. Political scientists have been at odds over polarization and if the effect is happening within the whole American electorate or only within the confines of the political elite (Abramowitz, 2013; DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson 1996; Fiorina, 2016). Through these discussions and research, there have been few clear answers. Abramowitz (2013), in *The Polarized Public,* suggests that the two major political parties are divided along all fronts: racial, cultural, geographic, ideological. Fiorina (2016) continually speaks out against Abramowitz and the idea that America has become polarized.

The introduction of the Internet to society has produced a wealth of news information sites. Many of these sites are highly favored by either liberals or conservatives, but research shows that rarely do opposing political views trust the same news source (Dimock, Kiley, Keeter, & Doherty, 2014). A study from Pew Research Center focuses specifically on polarization and provides a persuasive argument that polarization is happening at least with those who are politically active.

Almost four-in-ten (38%) politically engaged Democrats are consistent liberals, up from just 8% in 1994. The change among Republicans since then appears less dramatic – 33% express consistently conservative views, up from 23% in the midst of the 1994 "Republican Revolution." But a decade ago, just 10% of politically engaged Republicans had across-the-board conservative attitudes. (Dimock et al., 2014, p. 8)

Dimock et al. found that the politically active tend to hold views that are more negative of the other party than in previous years (2014). They also found that not only have the politically active become more polarized, but that the Republican and Democratic parties have a wider ideological gap than Pew Research Center had seen in the past two decades of conducting studies on Americans views of politics. Thus, the final research question is proposed:

RQ8: To what degree does the assumed political leaning of the political journalists impact how they present information about Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate, and Donald Trump, the Republican candidate?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

**Content Analysis**

"Content analysis, is specifically appropriate and necessary for (arguably) the central work of communication scholars, in particular those who study mass communication: the analysis of messages" (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Braken, 2002, p.587). Content analysis is the process of analyzing messages and summarizing them into categories (Neuendorf, 2002). This can apply to a vast range of communication methods such as books, television, newspapers, films, music, and social media, among many others. Researchers use content analysis to study "recorded human communication" (Babbie, 2004, p. 314). Content analysis has been used to look at a number of topics including violent media content, racial and gender roles and portrayals, body image, and ageism (Neuendorf, 2002; Waters, 2006).

This study used content analysis to investigate the use of Twitter by political journalist and what journalists were tweeting about during the final 2016 presidential debate. The concepts examined in the study are (a) objectivity of journalists and election and debate coverage by political journalists on Twitter; and (b) political journalist's discussion and depiction of political candidates, specifically in regards to female candidates.

**Method and Procedure**

**Selection of Journalists.** A Google search of the top political journalists on Twitter yielded endless results that were all subjective. A free, data-based source for political journalists was StatSocial (StatSocial, 2015). StatSocial used Twitter follower bases to develop a list of the most influential political journalists on the social platform. The most recent list was created in

2015. The raw data export from StatSocial states the list of political journalists and bloggers that they collected included 3,000 accounts.

The way that StatSocial developed the list of influential political journalists and bloggers was through the journalists' followers, not the journalists themselves. After collecting the list of 3,000 journalists StatSocial used Social Pull to remove anyone who had less than five times the average Twitter pull leaving just under 2,000 accounts. Social Pull is a StatSocial product that "measures how large someone's Twitter network is relative to the average Twitter user. It is calculated by looking at the 'followers of your followers' - while excluding spam and business accounts… For this politically adjusted ranking, we also looked at what percentage of each person's audience is actually interested in political topics, and discounted that person's Pull accordingly" (StatSocial – political journalists, 2015). Essentially StatSocial not only studied the followers of journalists, but followers who could have been considered opinion leaders. Opinion leaders follow Katz and Lazarsfeld's two-step flow of messages moving from the mass media (journalists) to the opinion leaders—which on Twitter have the ability to retweet journalists' messages to their followers—and finally to the general public (1955).

After identifying the top political journalists and bloggers, StatSocial published the list with the journalists divided into groups based on their Twitter pull. Journalists were ranked based on the amount of amount of pull they had, but also on the political leanings of their followers. This division into "Top Left," "Top Right," and "Top Centrist" journalists helped to develop a narrower selection of journalists for this study (*StatSocial - political journalists, 2015*).

The selection of journalists was based on the "top" journalists in each category. The top 50 journalists with a more right leaning and more left leaning following were selected initially.

The addition of the top 50 centrist journalists according to StatSocial gave a total base of 150 journalists.

**Selection of Tweets.** Tweets were gathered from the 150 journalists from StatSocial (2015). The focus of this study is the final presidential debate which was held on October 19, 2016. The final debate was chosen for the study because Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would both be discussing policy in a highly visible arena. Because political journalists and bloggers tweet about such events before, during, and after the event tweets were pulled from October 18 through October 20, 2016. Using the advanced search feature on Twitter, tweets were pulled for the date range 10 journalists at a time. All tweets from the 150 journalists were then copied and sorted into word processing documents based on which group (right leaning, left leaning, centrist) the journalists were a part of. The three documents were then counted, and samples were taken from each to be coded.

The Right Leaning Journalists document was comprised of 696 tweets from 37 journalists. The Left Leaning Journalists document contained 632 tweets from 32 journalists. The Centrist Journalist document held 830 tweets from 42 journalists. The following is a list of all journalist whose tweets were in the 2,158 total tweets collected by the researcher.

Table 1
*List of political journalists and bloggers used in the content analysis of tweets during the final 2016 presidential debate*

| Right Leaning Journalists | Left Leaning Journalists | Centrist Journalists |
|---|---|---|
| Jake Tapper* | Rachel Maddow | Chuck Todd* |
| Megyn Kelly* | Ezra Klein | Ben Smith* |
| Sean Hannity* | Arianna Huffington* | Brian Stelter* |
| Michelle Malkin* | Nate Silver* | Dave Weigel* |
| Dana Perino* | Christiane Amanpour | Wolf Blitzer |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bret Baier | Christopher Hayes* | Joe Scarborough* |
| Greta Van Susteren* | Glenn Greenwald* | Mark Knoller* |
| Glenn Beck* | Melissa Harris-Perry | Andrea Mitchell |
| Andrew Malcolm* | Fareed Zakaria* | Howard Kurtz* |
| Ann Coulter* | Nicholas Kristof* | David Frum* |
| Ed Henry | John Dickerson* | Jonathan Martin* |
| Dana Loesch* | David Corn* | Norah O'Donnell* |
| Brit Hume* | Robert Reich* | Maggie Haberman* |
| S.E. Cupp* | Katrina vandenHeuvel* | David Leonhardt* |
| Judge Napolitano | Jim Roberts* | Rick Klein* |
| Erick Erickson* | Lawrence O'Donnell | Mark Halperin* |
| Stephen Hayes | Tavis Smiley* | Blake Hounshell* |
| Kimberly Guilfoyle | Don Lemon | Josh Marshall* |
| Jonah Goldberg* | Markos Moulitsas* | Karen Tumulty* |
| Neil Cavuto | Thomas L. Friedman* | Garance Franke-Ruta* |
| Peggy Noonan | Ana Marie Cox* | Ryan Lizza* |
| Monica Crowley | Chris Cuomo* | Marc Ambinder |
| Kirsten Powers | Reverend Al Sharpton* | Willie Geist* |
| Robert Costa | Bill Keller | Jonathan Karl* |
| Mary Katharine Ham* | Charles M. Blow* | Dylan Byers* |
| Rich Lowry | Ari Melber | Molly Ball* |
| Bill Hemmer | Jonathan Capehart* | Josh Barro* |
| Anne Bayefsky | Toure* | Nick Confessore* |
| Martha Maccallum* | Felix Salmon | Taegan Goddard* |
| Dinesh D'Souza* | Kate Sheppard | Zeke Miller* |
| David Burge | Wesley Lowery* | Dan Balz* |
| Brian Kilmeade | Alex Wagner | Amanda Terkel |

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| | |
|---|---|
| Tammy Bruce | Alex Burns* |
| Ann-Marie Murrell | John Heilemann* |
| Matt Lewis | Christina Bellantoni |
| Jim Geraghty | Spencer Ackerman* |
| James Pethokoukis | Jonathan Chait* |
| | Amy Walter |
| | James Fallows* |
| | Roger Simon* |
| | John Harwood* |
| | Laura Rozen* |

Note: *indicates journalists/bloggers with tweets that were included in the final random sample.

**Sample.** The full documents of tweets from journalists during the date ranges of October 18 through October 20, 2016, were narrowed down into samples. The random sample for right leaning journalists was chosen by starting with the last tweet in the document and selecting every fourth tweet from that point. The left leaning and centrist journalist documents were randomly sampled by selecting the first tweet in the document and every fourth tweet following the starting point.

The sample included 540 tweets. 175 tweets from right leaning journalists, 157 tweets from left leaning journalists, and 208 tweets from centrist journalist. From these tweets the first 150 right leaning and 150 left leaning tweets were coded. The first 200 centrist tweets were coded.

**Variables**

Variables from Lawrence et al. (2014) and Waters et al. (2018), as well as the addition of new variables were used to provide a full look at the types of tweets from journalists and the

content within the tweets. In total 35 variables were accounted for during the coding process. The variables from *Tweeting Conventions* (Lawrence et al., 2014) are as follows.

**Variables related to gatekeeping.**

*Linking.* This variable looked at links on Twitter as a gatekeeping function. There were four coding responses for linking, whether the journalist was linking to their own work, work of a colleague, works of journalists at media outlets other than their own, and if the link was not related to new or media outlets at all (example: a YouTube link for a video that did not cover news).

*Retweeting:* Retweeting looked at whether or not journalists were sharing content from other Twitter users. If journalists did retweet, the tweet was further coded into whether it was a retweet from fellow journalists, news media outlets, Verified non-journalists (people who are assumed to be opinion leaders), or non-journalists who were not Verified.

*Information-seeking:* This variable indicated whether or not journalists used Twitter in any aspect to gain information on story leads, historical facts, or examples from their followers.

*Job talk:* Job talk was coded as an discussion of the journalist/blogger's job. This included pictures of the setting up for the debate site, comments on traveling to the debate, or any variation.

**Variables related to strategic coverage.**

*Horse race:* This variable was measured by whether or not the tweets mentioned a candidate's position in polling or a candidate's fundraising efforts.

*Candidate strategy:* Candidate strategy was measured on whether tweets contained mentions of specific voting blocs or demographics. Lawrence et al. (2014) noted that such mentions were signals of candidate strategy.

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*Policy:* Any mention of policy issues were measured for this variable. This included jobs, economy, foreign relations, health care, and immigration, among others.

*Candidate characteristics:* Candidate characteristics were measured in terms of appearance or personality. Secondary coding variables from Waters, et al. (2018) further dissected these characteristics.

**Variables related to objectivity.**

*Fact-checking:* Fact-checking is a common function of journalists during political elections. This variable measures to what degree political journalists/bloggers used Twitter to fact-check Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump or their campaign staff during the final presidential debate.

*Personal identity:* Personal identity was measured in relation to whether the journalist/blogger made their political party/affiliations or who they were going to vote for public through Twitter.

*Opinion:* This variable measured as opinion when they contained "evaluative language or offered unattributed commentary beyond the facts of an occurrence or issue" (Lawrence, et al., 2014, p. 798). Tweets that were indicated as opinion were further coded into if the opinion was in relation to Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump and if those opinions were positive or negative using a 5-point scale.

**Variables related to gendered traits.** The coders further dissected the variables relating directly to candidates using the variables presented in Waters, et al. (2018, in press) to identify the sentiment of the tweets that were about Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The study used a 5-point Likert scale to measure contrasting traits. These traits were tough vs. gentle, unemotional vs. warm, ambitious vs. trustworthy, strong leadership skills vs. strong people skills.

The coding then measured policy issues. Seven policy issues were identified in Waters, et al.'s (2018) paper. An eight issue was added to this present study because foreign affairs is a large policy issue in presidential elections that doesn't arise in gubernatorial elections. The policy issues measured that were "male" areas of expertise were economic development, immigration, infrastructure, foreign affairs and crime. Female areas of expertise that were coded were education, social welfare, quality of life (health related issues), and family (including abortion). These variables were measured on a 5-point scale from "very competent" to "very incompetent." If the issues were not mentioned, the coder used "3" for a neutral selection. Additional variables used from Waters, et al. (2018) are as follows:

*Appearance:* If the candidate's appearance is mentioned, it was done so in a _____ light. This was coded on a 5-point scale from very positive to very negative with an option for not applicable if appearance wasn't mentioned in the tweet at all.

*Electability:* The candidate is perceived as _____ to win the presidential election. Using the 5-point Likert scale, this was coded from very likely to very unlikely based on the context of the tweets. Horse-race tweets with either candidate winning in the polls were coded with the candidate as likely to win the election. Tweets about policy or strategy that eluded to a candidate winning the election due to their strategy were also coded as necessary.

**Additional variables.** During the selection of tweets, there was some concern that additional variables may have need to be added. Lawrence, et al (2014) excluded any tweets that were replies and didn't code for non-election related news or content. Additional variables were added by the coders. These are as follows:

*Reply:* This variable measured if the tweet was a reply to another tweet. Twitter is a social media platform where communication between individuals is encouraged. Replies looked

at whether the journalist/blogger used Twitter beyond that of an information sharing platform and as Twitter's initial function of a social media platform.

*Promotion:* Promotion looked beyond links to a journalist/blogger's website to hashtags, photos, and words to see if journalists/bloggers were promoting their network regularly.

*News:* This variable was created to note when journalists shared news information that was not election related.

*Election:* This variable was created to indicate when journalists spoke about the election but did not mention or elude to Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton.

*Campaign Characteristics:* This variable was added to see how journalists discussed Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton's campaigns as a whole. Beyond candidate characteristics, this measured tweets on a 5-point scale of "very positive" to "very negative" if the tweets contained any mention of a candidate's campaign. There was also a "0" or "not applicable" option for tweets that had no mention of the candidates or campaigns.

Coders also identified the gender of the journalists.

**Codebook**

The 2014 study about political journalists' use of Twitter during the 2012 presidential campaign by Lawrence et al. was the basis for the primary template for coding. A 2-point scale was used to determine if the tweets from the journalists and bloggers identified with the variables. If the coders indicated that the tweets did relate to variables about horse race, strategic coverage, or objectivity, the coders then used the second step of coding to further identify the details of the tweets.

Waters et al. (2018) study on gendered political news coverage during elections provided the secondary coding template for traits, issues, appearance, and electability for the presidential

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candidates. These variables were segmented into categories based on traits, political issues, appearance, and electability. All sentiment variables were measured on five-point scales. Traits were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Candidate competency was measured for campaign issues on a similar five-point scale. Appearance was measured on a spectrum of very positive to very negative. Finally, electability was measured based on whether tweets mentioned if candidates were very likely or unlikely to win the presidential election.

Two sets of coding were used for each variable to determine Twitter usage, Tweet sentiment, and discussion of traits, issues, and appearance. Each tweet was coded once by a single coder. 30% of tweets were coded a second time by another coder. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, adjusting for chance agreement, and all questions reached suitable levels above .7 (Cohen, 1960, 1968).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study examines the use of Twitter by political journalists and bloggers during the final 2016 presidential debate. This section will include the results from data gather from a content analysis of tweets from 101 political journalist and blogger Twitter accounts. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to analyze the sample of 500 tweets. The analysis process looks at the relationship between assumed political leaning and gender of the journalists and bloggers and the use of Twitter. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct the MANOVA. The independent variables are assumed political leaning with three levels: right leaning, left leaning, and centrist; and gender with two levels: male and female. The dependent variables are the 21 variables relating to the content of the tweets.

The research questions were addressed first.

RQ1: Are political journalists using Twitter to share links to their work, colleague's works, other news outlets, or non-journalistic works?

RQ2: To what degree are political journalists using Twitter to retweet the work or ideas of fellow journalists?

RQ3: To what degree are journalists using Twitter to gather information from their followers for story ideas, examples, historical facts, etc.?

RQ4: To what degree are political journalists using Twitter to share information regarding their daily work or working conditions?

RQ5: To what degree do political journalists' tweets focus on the election strategy, personal characteristics, or policy issues?

RQ6: To what degree do political journalists use Twitter to share opinions, personal

information, or conduct conversations with other users?

RQ7: To what degree do political journalists use Twitter to fact-checking of political

candidates?

To answer these questions, of the 21 variables on the uses of Twitter by political

journalists during the final 2016 presidential debate, Wilk's $\Lambda = .72$, $F(42,954) = 7.03$, $p < .01$,

$\eta^2 = .15$, ten variables were found to be significant: (1) Centrist journalists were more likely to

use links in their tweets, (2) Right and left leaning journalists were more likely to retweet tweets

than centrist journalists, (3) Centrist journalists were more likely to promote their own network

or website than right or left leaning journalists, (4) Centrist journalists were more likely to tweet

about their jobs, news, or the election than right or left leaning journalists, (5) Right leaning and

centrist journalists were more likely to tweet about news that was not related to the election than

left leaning journalists, (6) Left and centrist journalists were more likely to tweet about Donald

Trump's campaign than right leaning journalists, (7) Right leaning journalists tweeted more

about personal political affiliations than left leaning or centrist journalists, (8) Left leaning and

centrist journalists tweeted more opinions and unattributed commentary than right leaning

journalists, (9) Centrist journalists tweeted opinions about Hillary Clinton more often than right

or left leaning journalists, and (10) Left leaning and centrist journalists tweeted opinions about

Donald Trump more often than right leaning journalists. The means and standard deviations for

the uses of Twitter by political journalists and bloggers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations of Twitter uses by political journalists and bloggers based on assumed political leanings during the final 2016 presidential debate*

| VARIABLE | POLITICAL LEANING | MEAN | STD. DEVIATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| The tweet contained a link. | Right leaning | 0.83 | 1.42 |
|  | Left leaning | 0.53 | 1.23 |
|  | Centrist* | 1.10 | 1.54 |
| The tweet was a retweet. | Right leaning* | 1.32 | 0.47 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.47 | 0.50 |
|  | Centrist* | 1.25 | 0.43 |
| If the tweet was a retweet, from whom? | Right leaning | 0.70 | 1.23 |
|  | Left leaning | 0.69 | 0.10 |
|  | Centrist | 0.79 | 1.50 |
| The tweet was a reply. | Right leaning | 1.22 | 0.43 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.19 | 0.40 |
|  | Centrist | 1.28 | 0.45 |
| The tweet was a request for information from followers. | Right leaning | 1.01 | 0.12 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.00 | 0.00 |
|  | Centrist | 1.00 | 0.00 |
| The tweet was a promotion of the journalist's own network or website. | Right leaning | 1.17 | 0.38 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.12 | 0.33 |
|  | Centrist* | 1.23 | 0.42 |
| The tweet was related to the news, election, or journalist's job. | Right leaning | 1.52 | 0.50 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.59 | 0.49 |
|  | Centrist* | 1.69 | 0.47 |
| The tweet contained information about the journalist's day to day job. | Right leaning | 1.11 | 0.34 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.08 | 0.27 |
|  | Centrist | 1.06 | 0.24 |
| The tweet was news related, but not about the election. | Right leaning* | 1.17 | 0.37 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.13 | 0.33 |

|  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Centrist* | 1.27 | 0.45 |
| The tweet was in relation to the election, but did not identify a candidate. | Right leaning | 1.15 | 0.36 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.15 | 0.36 |
|  | Centrist | 1.18 | 0.38 |
| The tweet was regarding a candidate's relative position in public opinion polls. | Right leaning | 1.03 | 0.18 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.05 | 0.21 |
|  | Centrist | 1.06 | 0.24 |
| The tweet mentioned any specific voting bloc or demographic group. | Right leaning | 1.03 | 0.16 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.01 | 0.08 |
|  | Centrist | 1.03 | 0.17 |
| The tweet mentioned policy issues. | Right leaning | 1.01 | 0.08 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.01 | 0.12 |
|  | Centrist | 1.03 | 0.17 |
| The tweet discussed the candidates' personal characteristics. | Right leaning | 1.03 | 0.16 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.05 | 0.23 |
|  | Centrist | 1.02 | 0.12 |
| The tweet discussed Donald Trump's campaign. | Right leaning | 0.11 | 0.51 |
|  | Left leaning* | 0.30 | 0.74 |
|  | Centrist* | 0.30 | 0.77 |
| The tweet discussed Hillary Clinton's campaign. | Right leaning | 0.14 | 0.61 |
|  | Left leaning | 0.10 | 0.59 |
|  | Centrist | 0.21 | 0.76 |
| The tweet was a fact check on a comment from a candidate. | Right leaning | 1.00 | 0.00 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.00 | 0.00 |
|  | Centrist | 1.01 | 0.10 |
| The tweet offered insight into the journalist's political party or affiliation. | Right leaning* | 1.05 | 0.21 |
|  | Left leaning | 1.00 | 0.00 |
|  | Centrist | 1.02 | 0.12 |
|  | Right leaning | 1.01 | 0.12 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The tweet was an opinion on the election. | Left leaning* | 1.09 | 0.28 |
| | Centrist* | 1.11 | 0.31 |
| If the opinion was about Clinton, what was the tone? | Right leaning | 0.01 | 0.16 |
| | Left leaning | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist* | 0.09 | 0.51 |
| If the opinion was about Trump, what was the tone? | Right leaning | 0.01 | 0.16 |
| | Left leaning* | 0.15 | 0.53 |
| | Centrist* | 0.15 | 0.56 |

Next, the hypotheses and final research question were addressed.

H1a: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Hillary Clinton's stereotypically "female" traits in her presidential race than her stereotypically "male" traits.

H1b: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Donald Trump's stereotypically "male" traits in his presidential race than his stereotypically "female" traits.

H2: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of stereotypically "female" issues versus "male" issues in regards to Hillary Clinton's presidential and stereotypically "male" issues in regards to Donald Trump's campaign.

H3: There will be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Hillary Clinton's appearance than of Donald Trump's appearance.

RQ8: To what degree does the assumed political leaning of the political journalist impact how they present information about Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate, and Donald Trump, the Republican candidate?

To answer these questions, of the 19 variables of gendered traits, issues, appearance, and electability were used. The first set of data addresses tweets from right leaning, left leaning, and

centrist journalists and bloggers' perceptions of Hillary Clinton in regards to the variables. A

MANOVA analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between political journalist's

leanings and the perceptions of Hillary Clinton through their tweets. No variables were found to

be significant, assumptions of why will be discussed in the next section. Wilk's $\Lambda = .63$, $F(12,52)$

$= .91$, $p < .54$, $\eta^2 = .17$. The means and standard deviations for the relationship between political

leanings and perceived traits and competence of issues of Hillary Clinton are presented in Table

3.

Table 3
*Means and Standard Deviations of perceptions of Hillary Clinton by political journalists based on assumed political leanings during the final 2016 presidential debate*

| VARIABLES | POLITICAL LEANING | MEAN | STD. DEVIATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as tough. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.10 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 3.06 | 0.25 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as gentle. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 2.90 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 2.94 | 0.25 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as unemotional. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as warm. | Right leaning | 3.13 | 0.35 |
| | Left leaning | 2.90 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 2.94 | 0.25 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as ambitious. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.10 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as trustworthy. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.94 | 0.25 |
| | Right leaning | 3.13 | 0.35 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as having strong leadership/administration skills. | Left leaning | 3.10 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 2.94 | 0.25 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as having strong people skills. | Right leaning | 3.13 | 0.35 |
| | Left leaning | 3.10 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 2.94 | 0.25 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on economic development issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.06 | 0.25 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on immigration issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on infrastructure/transportation issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on crime issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on education issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on social welfare issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on quality of life issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on family issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ on foreign affairs issues. | Right leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 2.90 | 0.32 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Right leaning | 0.00 | 0.00 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| If Hillary Clinton's appearance is mentioned, it is done so in a _____ light. | Left leaning | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Hillary Clinton is perceived as _____ to win the presidential race. | Right leaning | 3.38 | 0.92 |
| | Left leaning | 3.30 | 0.82 |
| | Centrist | 3.69 | 1.14 |

To further answer the hypotheses and research question posed above the , of the same 19 variables of gendered traits, issues, appearance, and electability were used in regards to Donald Trump. The following set of data addresses tweets from right leaning, left leaning, and centrist journalists and bloggers' perceptions of Donald Trump in regards to the variables. A MANOVA analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between political journalist's leanings and the perceptions of Donald Trump through their tweets. As with the data set for Hillary Clinton, no variables were found to be significant. Wilk's $\Lambda = .52$, $F(26,82) = 1.22$, $p < .25$, $\eta^2 = .28$. The means and standard deviations for the relationship between assumed political leanings of journalists and bloggers and perceived traits and competence of issues of Donald Trump are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
*Means and Standard Deviations of perceptions of Donald Trump by political journalists based on assumed political leanings during the final 2016 presidential debate*

| VARIABLES | POLITICAL LEANING | MEAN | STD. DEVIATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Donald Trump is perceived as tough. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.29 |
| | Centrist | 3.00 | 0.85 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as gentle. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.76 | 0.52 |
| | Centrist | 2.35 | 0.89 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as unemotional. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.76 | 0.52 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.77 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Donald Trump is perceived as warm. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.72 | 0.61 |
| | Centrist | 2.38 | 0.85 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as ambitious. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.88 | 0.33 |
| | Centrist | 3.15 | 0.78 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as trustworthy. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.80 | 0.50 |
| | Centrist | 2.65 | 0.80 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as having strong leadership/administration skills. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.80 | 0.41 |
| | Centrist | 2.73 | 0.67 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as having strong people skills. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.80 | 0.41 |
| | Centrist | 2.73 | 0.72 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on economic development issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on immigration issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.84 | 0.47 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on infrastructure/transportation issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on crime issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on education issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on social welfare issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| | | | |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on quality of life issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| | | | |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on family issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 3.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 2.88 | 0.59 |
| | | | |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ on foreign affairs issues. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 1.34 |
| | Left leaning | 2.92 | 0.28 |
| | Centrist | 2.73 | 0.72 |
| | | | |
| If Donald Trump's appearance is mentioned, it is done so in a _____ light. | Right leaning | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | Left leaning | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | Centrist | 0.04 | 0.20 |
| | | | |
| Donald Trump is perceived as _____ to win the presidential race. | Right leaning | 2.40 | 0.89 |
| | Left leaning | 2.68 | 0.69 |
| | Centrist | 2.46 | 0.71 |

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

**Discussion of Findings**

The results of this study surprised the researcher in many ways. Analysis of the results reveal that political journalists and bloggers were active during the days surrounding the final presidential debate, just not in ways that were predicted through past research.

**Links.** The first research question (RQ1) we approached was in regards to gatekeeping, or the selection of what information the public is exposed to by the gatekeepers, who in this study are the bloggers and journalists. This study found that political journalists were using Twitter to share links to their work (11.6%), colleague's works (5.8%), other news outlets (9%), or non-journalistic works (2.6%) much less frequently than they were tweeting without links (71%). These numbers are slightly lower than Molyneux and Mourão's (2017) findings from political journalist's tweets during the 2016 election. 34% of tweets in their study contained links versus 29% of tweets in the sample used in this present study. When compared to the Lawrence et al. (2014) study that was a model for this research question, the results are nearly identical. 28.5% of tweets in study from 2014 contained links compared to the 29% of tweets in the present study. When breaking down the percentages further the numbers are still similar to the previous study. This indicates that the in the four years since the original study was conducted journalists haven't changed their patterns in regards to tweeting links to their work or the works of others.

**Retweets.** The second research question (RQ2) looked at how journalists used the retweet function on Twitter. Do they share information from other journalists? Are they sharing content from "outsiders" or people who aren't affiliated with media organizations? The coding process revealed that right and left leaning journalists retweet a significantly higher amount of

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tweets than centrists. Out of 500 tweets 33% were retweets by journalists. This is a higher

percentage of retweets compared to the Lawrence et al. study which found that only 23.5% of

tweets from their sample of political journalists in 2012 were retweets (2014). This suggests that

retweeting has become a more widely used function of Twitter. 39.5% of retweets were from

journalists or news organizations.

**Request for information.** The next research question (RQ3) explored to what degree

journalists used Twitter ask a way to gather information from their followers for story ideas,

examples, historical facts, etc. The results for the tested variables were not significant, therefore

the conclusion can be made that requests for information from the public via Twitter isn't a

typical use of the website for journalists. Only two of the 500 sampled tweets contained any

request for information from the journalist's followers. The Lawrence et al. (2014) study found

that 1.7% of tweets from journalists during the 2012 election were requests for information. Less

than 1% of the sampled tweets in this present study dealt with requests for information meaning

that journalists are possibly requesting less information from followers than they have in years

past.

**Job talk.** Research question four (RQ4) was not recognized as a significant variable in

the studied sample. Only 8.4% of tweets in the sample were in regards to journalist's daily work

or working conditions. In comparison, 14.7% of tweets from the 2012 election from political

journalists were in regards to job talk (Lawrence et al., 2014).

**Candidate strategy and characteristics.** None of the variables about candidate strategy

and candidate characteristics were found to be significant in the studied sample. Despite that,

there is still plenty of information about the tweet sample that can be discovered. Candidate

strategy and characteristics includes the variables horse race, candidate strategy, policy, and

candidate characteristics. 4.8% of the total tweet sample were tweets regarding horse race, or polling position. 2.2% of tweets were about candidate strategy, 1.8% about policy, and 3% were in regards to candidate characteristics. Compared to Lawrence et al. (2014), these numbers are quite different than the content journalists tweeted about in past elections. Horse race was discussed more (4.8% vs. 2.3%), but the other variables all decreased compared to the previous election.

Additional variables of campaign characteristics was added to this research question. These variables looked at tweets about each campaign as a whole to understand the tone in which political journalists and bloggers were talking about the election. 12.2% of the total tweets sample were tweets about Donald Trump's campaign. Of those tweets 76.7% had negative tones to the wording, 0% were positively toned. These conversations significantly came from left and centrist journalists and bloggers. Tweets about Hillary Clinton's campaign were 5.8% of the total tweet sample. Of those tweets 37.9% were negatively toned, 41.4% had a neutral tone, and 20.7% had a positive tone.

**Personal identity and opinion.** The next research question (RQ6) looked at the degree to which political journalists use Twitter to share opinions, personal information, or conduct conversations with other users. 1.1% of tweets in the previous study were in relation to political identity; 29.1% of tweets from journalists contained opinions (Lawrence et al., 2014). In the present study 2% of tweets were about the political identity of journalists and 7.2% were opinions about the elections. This suggests that political journalists aren't keen on sharing their political identities and opinions, possibly in an effort to stay unbiased.

Journalists with an assumed right leaning tendency were significantly more likely to mention their political affiliations or party. In contrast, assumed left leaning and centrist

journalists were more willing to share opinions via Twitter than right leaning journalists and bloggers. This indicates that while right leaning journalists are open about their political party, they try to remain unbiased when tweeting about the news and election. On the other hand, left leaning and centrist journalists were willing to share their opinions, but not party affiliations.

**Fact-checking.** (RQ7) In the entire tweet sample only two tweets (.4%) were fact-checks of political candidates. The results on fact-checking in Lawrence et al. (2014) were somewhat similar. Only 1.5% of tweets in the previous study related to fact-checking.

**Political polarization.** The final research question was in regards to political polarization and communication. The question (RQ8) inquired to what degree does the assumed political leaning of the political journalist impact how they present information about Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate, and Donald Trump, the Republican candidate? This was tested by using the independent variable of assumed political leaning and the secondary coding data. The secondary coding was a result of the first round of coding using Lawrence et al.'s (2014) variables to determine the type of tweet and content. Once the tweet was determined as being specifically about Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, the tweets were coded using Waters et al's (2018, in press) variables for gendered issues and traits. This secondary coding methods limited the data sample to roughly 10% of the original sample. As noted in Tables 3 and 4, there were no significant statistics regarding traits and policy issues for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, therefore this research question will remain unanswered until further research can be conducted.

**Gendered traits.** There was not enough data from the tweets to support any of the proposed hypotheses. Of the 500 total tweets that were coded only 10.8% (54 tweets) were in regards to gendered issues and traits for Donald Trump and 6.8% (36 tweets) fit the criteria to be coded on gendered issues and traits for Hillary Clinton. The first hypothesis (H1a) was that there

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would be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Hillary Clinton's stereotypically "female" traits in her presidential race than her stereotypically "male" traits. The opposite of that would be assumed to be true as well. The inverse of the first hypothesis was as follows (H1b), there would be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Donald Trump's stereotypically "male" traits in his presidential race than his stereotypically "female" traits. The sample numbers are incredibly small for the testing of traits, but the results did show journalists and bloggers who tweeted about Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton did so with a negative perceptions, although not gendered.

The second hypothesis (H2) that was tested was that there would be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of stereotypically "female" issues versus "male" issues in regards to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, and stereotypically "male" issues in regards to Donald Trump's campaign. The only issues that were tweeted about in regards to Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump were economy, immigration, and foreign affairs. In the only tweet about Hillary Clinton about economic issues, a stereotypically "male" issue, she was coded as "competent" by a left leaning journalist. Donald Trump had three tweets in relation to his competency with immigration issues. In all three tweets he was coded as "incompetent" with the stereotypically male issue. Both Trump and Clinton were mentioned in tweets about foreign affairs. In the single tweet about Hillary Clinton, she was as perceived as "incompetent" with foreign affairs issues. Donald Trump was mentioned in five tweets about foreign affairs. In all five tweets he was also perceived as "incompetent" with this stereotypical "male" issue.

The final hypothesis (H3), was that there would be more mentions by political journalists on Twitter of Hillary Clinton's appearance than of Donald Trump's appearance. This was not supported by the data collected. Only one tweet referred to the appearance of a candidate. The

tweet was in regards to Donald Trump's appearance (@JamesFallows Staggering to imagine what race would be like now w Kasich, Rubio, Jeb, even Mitt etc as nominee, rather than an angry clown.)

An overarching theme from the results of this study is that centrists are more active in news sharing functions of Twitter than right or left leaning journalists. Centrists tweeted links, retweeted other journalists, promoted their own website or networks, and shared information regarding non-election news more than right or left leaning journalists. Centrist journalists were also found to have less personal conversations through Twitter.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

**Limitations.** There are several limitations to this research. The first is the use of a database that gave perceived and assumed political leanings for political journalists and bloggers (StatSocial, 2015). Second, Twitter analytics is advanced for social media search function, but results may have yielded better with access to software that pulled data as it was happening. In the time frame since the final presidential debate of 2016 tweets may have been deleted or usernames of journalists changed, which could have resulted in a larger sample size for coding. Additionally, this study was conducted by a single researcher. Bias during content analysis could have been present since the researcher is female and has a heavy political leaning.

**Future directions.** Further research needs to be done into the perceived "male" and "female" issues and traits of political candidates on Twitter. The hypotheses were unable to be supported due to a lack of data, so future directions should include a repeat of this study with a larger sample size and the explicit purpose of studying gendered traits in political journalist's communication via Twitter.

**Conclusion**

Twitter continues to be a news source for the public and a hotspot for journalists sharing news and engaging with others. It is clear from an analysis of past research and the data collected in this study that the sharing of news stories and content is the primary function for political journalists but that personal uses are becoming more prevalent. This research aims to fill the gap in research on gendered issues and traits in online political journalism, specifically through Twitter. Past research discusses the use of Twitter by political journalists and bloggers and the appearance of gendered traits in political journalism, but crossover research in the two subjects has not been conducted to the same degree.

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