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WHAT'S IN A TWEET?

Foreign correspondents' use of social media

Raluca Cozma and Kuan-Ju Chen

Given the ongoing debate about foreign correspondence being an endangered species and the foreign news hole shrinking ever more, this study explores how foreign correspondents at major US networks and print outlets use Twitter to break news, promote their work and their news organization, and communicate with their audiences. Findings show that correspondents use Twitter mainly to discuss current events where they are stationed or elsewhere and to promote their news outlet rather than to break news. Broadcast correspondents are more likely to break news, while print correspondents tend to share their opinion and link to other news outlets in their tweets more. While broadcast and print correspondents are equally active on Twitter, the broadcast ones are more popular. Popularity on Twitter is predicted by how long the correspondents have been on the platform and by use of Twitter-specific features like hashtags. The two genders were proportionately represented on Twitter, and no significant differences were found between male and female correspondents on any of the variables under investigation. Many correspondents are still ditching their profiles, setting it to private, or not providing helpful information in their Twitter biographies.

KEYWORDS content analysis; foreign correspondence; social media; Twitter; uses and gratifications

Introduction

The Internet has been an integral part of journalists' life for more than a decade, challenging and altering the way they report the news. Social networking websites are the newest addition to the mix, and reporters started using them to disseminate updates on major events (Lasorsa et al., 2011), to engage with audiences and sources, and even to promote their work (Ahmad, 2010; Farhi, 2009). As Bucy notes, "Gatekeeping roles are eroding, storytelling techniques are transforming, and new media entrepreneurs are challenging industry players and practices" (2003, p. xi). In a fragmented, fast-changing, and fast-growing online world that Tom Friedman (2002) calls "an open sewer: an electronic conduit for untreated, unfiltered information," this study investigates how traditional US foreign correspondents get their expert voices heard on the relatively new platform of Twitter.

Despite being an elite, specialized class apart and above regular reporters (Cozma, 2009), and living a more exciting life than your typical journalist on the city beat, foreign correspondents represent one of the most understudied groups of media professionals (Hamilton and Lawrence, 2010). Their physical remoteness from their home office and their audiences, as well as their proximity to the most thrilling events around the world, including uprisings, wars, and revolutions, make them ideal users of social media platforms like Twitter, which were created to bridge geographical barriers and to facilitate fast dissemination of information from any corner of the world. Studying foreign correspondence in non-traditional settings is important in a media landscape where, despite

increased globalization and US involvement in international affairs, original foreign newsgathering is diminishing and Americans' interest in world news is dwindling (Hamilton and Lawrence, 2010). New media technologies have the potential to bring innovative and improved ways of attracting audiences home and abroad and informing them about the world.

Twitter as News Medium

Twitter, which is one of the top-three social networking sites in the world (Telford, 2012), has become another social networking tool used by the news media industry (Johnson, 2009; Kwak et al., 2010; Lasorsa et al., 2011; McIntyre, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2011; Schultz and Sheffer, 2010; Subasic and Berendt, 2011). In fact, some news organizations like the BBC and Reuters regard activity on Twitter as official news output (Hamilton, 2011; Henriksson, 2011). Social media play such a crucial role in the routines of the contemporary news gatherer, that news organizations updated their editorial guidelines to include suggestions, best practice standards and housekeeping rules for their reporters who use social networking, microblogging, and third-party websites for both professional/official and personal purposes. In October 2009, NPR made public an in-house guide to tweeting as part of its "Social Media Guidelines." Unlike similar guidelines from the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* that essentially told their staff to be careful walking through the social media minefield, the NPR guide embraced the possibilities brought about by new platforms. The policy, meant to help its staff make use of the wide array of social media tools and still maintain NPR's credibility, treated social media as an extension of the traditional news platform and started with the following paragraph:

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, have become an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. As NPR grows to serve the audience well beyond the radio, social media is becoming an increasingly important aspect of our interaction and our transparency with our audience and with a variety of communities. Properly used, social networking sites can also be very valuable newsgathering and reporting tools and can speed research and extend a reporter's contacts, and we encourage our journalists to take advantage of them. (Schumacher-Matos, 2009)

The policy went on to urge staff members—even those not involved in news production—to act and think the same when using social media as when they use other tools and essentially not tweet what they would not say on-air (Schumacher-Matos, 2009). Following some controversial news events like the Casey Anthony trial and the successful gay marriage vote in New York, Associated Press employees were demanded to rein in personal opinion on social media to avoid undermining "the credibility of our colleagues who have been working so hard to assure balanced and unbiased coverage of these issues" (Tennant, 2011).

Twitter has been deemed a virtual water cooler because it allows strangers to directly discuss subjects of common interest through the use of hashtags. This is achieved by prefixing a word with a hash symbol, as in *#Egypt*. Adding the hashtag *#Egypt* to tweets meant that the communication could be viewed by all users who followed or

participated in the ongoing chat about events unfolding in Egypt. The hashtag convention allows users to add context to tweets and contribute to trending topics.

Others have likened Twitter to a news wire service because news workers, eyewitnesses, and citizen journalists can send out messages in real time from any corner of the world when news stories break. The immediacy with which short messages can be disseminated to a large mass of people has made Twitter especially popular during crises—from hyper-local to international—such as road closures, emergency plane landings, uprisings, tornadoes, and earthquakes. This speed of delivery, its stripped-down interface, and the ease to maintain an account and incorporate it into organizational websites make Twitter especially suitable for use as a journalistic tool. It is a free content delivery system that, if used strategically, can make news operations more competitive in a crowded media field (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010). By connecting directly with users or by pointing them to other content, journalists can use Twitter to distribute news, find sources, and gather information, as well as increase audience and thus revenue.

Others have called the awareness system made possible by Twitter “ambient journalism” (Hermida, 2010). The broad and constant stream of information allows citizens to build custom newspapers but also alerts journalists to trends and issues worth investigating.

This study explores how foreign correspondents use Twitter for professional and personal purposes. It also investigates how foreign correspondents present themselves on Twitter, how platform-savvy they are, and what variables predict higher traction on the microblogging site.

Uses and Gratifications of Social Media

Twitter has been around for almost six years (it launched in October 2006), and its popularity has grown exponentially, as indicated by the 175 million registered accounts (and probably more visitors) and the 200 million tweets (one-to-many or one-to-one text messages on Twitter) sent out daily as of June 2011 (Twitter Blog, June 30, 2011). Data from the Pew Research Center (2011) show that 13 percent of the US adult population uses the status update service. Research (Lipsman, 2009) also found that Twitter attracts news junkies. The average Twitter user is two to three times more likely to visit a leading news website than the average online user. For example, while 17 percent of the total US Internet audience visited CNN.com in March 2009, more than double that percentage (38 percent) of Twitter visitors did so (Lipsman, 2009). The potential to tap into this generally young, educated and information-hungry audience, coupled with its accessibility and ease of use (via a variety of mobile and desktop applications), has turned Twitter into an appealing platform for Hollywood stars, political figures, and journalists who can post tweets (messages of 140 or fewer characters) to communicate with fans, voters, and audiences.

Recent uses and gratifications scholarship indicates that, just like other social media, Twitter satisfies certain professional needs and expectations. Local TV and radio stations use it mainly to publish news stories rather than for promotion and branding (Ferguson and Greer, 2011; Greer and Ferguson, 2011). TV stations’ official Twitter accounts fail to direct viewers to the stations’ on-air programming, indicating that the young platform’s interactive features are not yet used to their full potential (Greer and Ferguson, 2011).

Survey and content analysis research has found a discrepancy between sports journalists' responses about their uses of Twitter and their actual output on the microblogging service. While the reporters said they were using Twitter for breaking news and promotion (Schultz and Sheffer, 2011), analysis of their shared content found that the dominant use of Twitter was commentary and opinion (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010). Similarly, Java et al. (2007) found that average citizens use the microblogging platform for four reasons: daily chatter, conversation, sharing information, and news reporting.

Given the dearth of related research and the relative youth of the platform, the first research question asks:

RQ1: What were the most frequent uses of Twitter accounts created by foreign correspondents?

Research on sports journalists' uses of Twitter has found differences by type of news outlet. Fewer newspaper reporters were active on the microblogging service, and, unlike their broadcast counterparts, they used Twitter more for breaking news rather than for sharing opinion. The second research question is inspired by uses of Twitter by this specialized group of journalists, whose coverage of sports often transcends national barriers, and sets out to examine differences by news outlet type:

RQ2: Do Twitter uses differ between print and broadcast foreign correspondents?

Twitter Savviness, Interactivity and Popularity

The standard Twitter template contains sections with the owner's name, a short biography, an optional link to a home page (news outlet website in the correspondents' case), and a photo. After creating an account, a user can subscribe to other users' messages (*following*) and others subscribe to his (*followers*). The numbers of followers and of people the user is following are listed on the Twitter account. As of late 2009, users can follow lists of authors instead of just individual authors. Being listed means that you belong to a group that your followers have special interests in. Being on a larger number of lists is thus a sign of popularity, as is being followed by more people. Some popular news-media names now have Twitter followings that are almost as large as the circulation of their newspapers or viewership of their TV shows (Farhi, 2009).

Uses and gratifications research on political candidates' use of Twitter (Cozma and Chen, 2011) has found that politicians jumped on the new bandwagon without really knowing what they are doing. In the 2010 US midterm elections, 20 percent of congressional candidates failed to introduce themselves, and thus their campaign, in the bio section of their Twitter account, and many of them did not link to their campaign site. Most of them hardly tweeted, and a good percent ditched the platform altogether after creating an account. This study thus investigates how active foreign correspondents are on Twitter and how savvy they are. Twitter's stripped-down interface presents a dearth of information to evaluate as compared to other social media. It is crucial, therefore, to take advantage of the limited resources to create a credible, likeable, and informative account. The analysis hence focuses on the strategic uses of Twitter by foreign correspondents and the extent to which they present themselves as journalists, use personal or professional photos in their bio, if at all, and link to their news organization:

RQ3: How do correspondents present themselves on Twitter?

This study defines interactivity as an attribute of two-way communication between a sender and a receiver (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1998; Stromer-Galley, 2004). In this case, the senders are foreign correspondents, and the receivers are their followers on Twitter. For the communication process to become interactive, the sender and the receiver must have the opportunity to change roles and take turns to communicate (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1998).

Because tweets are so short (140 characters), users of Twitter who want to effectively get their message across to their followers would need to tweet more and include links to external sites. Political communication research has found, for instance, that politicians who tweeted more had a larger number of followers and lists (Cozma and Chen, 2011) and even received more votes during elections (Vergeer et al., 2011). It is hence probable that Twitter users will follow and list the foreign correspondents who are communicating more on Twitter (they work in the communication business, after all).

In addition to being active on Twitter, foreign correspondents can engage followers by using Twitter-specific interactive tools, such as replies, retweets, and hashtags. Interaction means initiating communication with other users or replying to their messages, which Twitter allows through *@username* replies and retweets. Farhi (2009) notes that journalists can use hashtags as a reporting, source-building, and community-organizing tool, allowing them to freewheel debates and exchange on trending topics. Kwak et al. (2010) found that the majority of trending topics on Twitter tend to be headlines of breaking or ongoing news on sports, cities, or brands (Kwak et al., 2010). Using hashtags, journalists can contribute but also aggregate information on unfolding events as other media and eyewitnesses tweet about them. An example would be the worldwide public sharing of news on the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, which generated about 140,000 tweets in the hours immediately following the earthquake (Brunns, 2011). Hashtags and personalized messages can bring coherence to what can easily become a cacophony of voices. The following hypothesis thus predicts a direct relationship between Twitter dynamics and popularity:

H1: Correspondents who are highly active and interactive will be more popular on Twitter (that is, have more followers and lists).

Method

A content analysis was conducted to answer the research questions and hypothesis formulated above. The unit of analysis for the study is the Twitter account created and maintained by a foreign correspondent from one of the nine mainstream news outlets in the United States that have a foreign news operation. For broadcast news outlets, all the foreign correspondents working for National Public Radio (NPR), Cable News Network (CNN), American Broadcasting Company (ABC), Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS), and National Broadcasting Company (NBC) were searched on Twitter and their profiles saved for offline analysis in February 2011, a time when the Arab Spring was in full swing. FOX News was excluded from the analysis, as only one of its correspondents was found on Twitter, and the account had restricted public access to it. Print foreign correspondents working for *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* were also researched. A typical Twitter account consists of a standard interface where account creators enter information with the purpose of presenting themselves to online visitors. The bulk of the Twitter account consists of the text-based

posts of 140 characters—the tweets. In order to capture all dimensions of Twitter use by foreign correspondents, the last five tweets of each correspondent was recorded and coded (as previously done by Sheffer and Schultz, 2010).

Sample

A complete list of the foreign correspondents was acquired from the biographic category on the official websites of each news organization. Out of these 174 foreign correspondents, 48 broadcast foreign correspondents (or about 51 percent of all correspondents) had *active* Twitter accounts. That is, the coders could identify several more accounts that belonged to so-called Twitter-ditchers—correspondents who created an account but never tweeted, as well as to correspondents who set their profiles to private. Foreign correspondents working at ABC and CNN have the highest presence on Twitter (Table 1). ABC News lists 11 foreign correspondents, and nine of their accounts were identified on Twitter (82 percent). CNN lists 43 foreign correspondents, and 36 of them were identified (83 percent) on Twitter. Only 33 percent (two out of six) of NBC correspondents and 29 percent (two out of seven) of the CBS correspondents were found on Twitter. For NPR, four of the 26 correspondents maintained a profile on Twitter (15 percent) at the time of this analysis.

As for print outlets, 12 out of a total of 24 *New York Times* correspondents were on Twitter (50 percent), and six out of the 15 *Los Angeles Times* foreign correspondents were on Twitter (40 percent). Of the 17 *Washington Post* correspondents, eight had Twitter accounts (47 percent), and 11 of 25 *Wall Street Journal* foreign correspondents (44 percent) were on Twitter. About 60 percent of the accounts belonged to men, which indicates a balanced gender presence on Twitter, as 33 percent of the full-time US journalists are women, according to Weaver et al. (2007, p. 8).

The largest number of correspondents, 35 percent of the total sample, tweeted from Asia and the Pacific, with China (15 reporters), India (seven), Hong Kong (four), and Japan (three) being the most represented. The second largest group, at 30 percent, was stationed in Europe, with the United Kingdom being represented the most in the entire sample (16 reporters). In the region, Russia followed with five correspondents, France with

TABLE 1
US foreign correspondents on Twitter

News outlet	Total number of foreign correspondents	Correspondents on Twitter	Percentage on Twitter
Broadcast			
CNN	43	36	83
ABC	11	9	82
NBC	6	2	33
CBS	7	2	29
NPR	26	4	15
Print			
<i>New York Times</i>	24	12	50
<i>Washington Post</i>	17	8	47
<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	25	11	44
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	15	5	33
Overall	174	89	51

three, and Spain and Germany with one each. Not surprisingly, given the events unfolding in the Middle East at the time of the study, 20 percent of the correspondents were stationed in this region. Six reporters tweeted from Egypt, three from Lebanon, three from Pakistan, two from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkey respectively, and one each from Iran, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. Latin America was represented by only five foreign correspondents in Mexico, Brazil, and Cuba, while a mere four reporters in South Africa and Nigeria represented Africa. These numbers correspond with total averages for what regions are most covered by US foreign correspondents, as reported by the *American Journalism Review* (Kumar, 2011).

Categories

This study set out to analyze the uses and gratifications of Twitter among foreign correspondents and to identify the extent to which interactive tools were used to network with Twitter followers.

Categories for determining uses of Twitter for journalistic purposes were derived from research into uses and gratifications of people who create personal Web pages and blogs (Papacharissi, 2002; Trammell, 2005) and uses and gratifications of social networking sites (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010). These categories included: to discuss current events where stationed, to discuss current events elsewhere, to break news, to share opinions, to share random observations, to promote one's news outlet, to promote other news outlets, and to ask followers for leads or other information.

Categories related to interactivity were dictated by the unique features of Twitter: presence or absence of link to news outlet website or personal site/blog/Facebook page, use of hyperlinks within tweets, number of followers in a correspondent's network, numbers of people each correspondent is following back, number of times a correspondent is listed, use of replies, retweets, and hashtags, as well as number and frequency of tweets.

Two coders were trained over two training sessions, and assigned to code about half of the sample each. Intercoder reliability calculated for 10 percent of the sample ranged from 0.89 to 1.00 on Krippendorff's alpha.

Findings

The first research question examined the uses of Twitter by foreign correspondents. Overall, 27 percent of tweets discussed current events in the countries where the correspondents were stationed (see Table 2). Nineteen percent of tweets focused on events happening elsewhere in the world. About 13 percent of tweets disseminated breaking news. Slightly fewer were used to share personal views (10 percent). Much fewer recorded random observations (2 percent) made by the correspondent about life, the profession, technology, etc., or personal information and messages (8 percent). Another 14 percent of tweets were used to promote the correspondents' own news outlet, and 2 percent of tweets promoted news items from other media organizations. Lastly, about 6 percent of Twitter messages took advantage of the technology, asking followers for leads, information, or opinion.

Independent sample *t*-tests found no significant differences between women's and men's uses of Twitter, but broadcast foreign correspondents differed from their print

TABLE 2
Uses of Twitter by correspondent type (% of tweets)

	All correspondents (N = 89)	Broadcast correspondents (N = 53)	Print correspondents (N = 36)	<i>t</i>
Discuss current events where stationed	27	25	29	-0.49
Discuss current events elsewhere	19	15	22	-1.15
Break news	13	19	4	3.04**
Share opinion	10	6	14	-1.9*
Make random observations	2	2	2	0.03
Post personal information	8	10	6	1.2
Promote own media outlet	13	13	13	-0.16
Promote other media outlets	2	0	4	-2.32**
Ask questions	6	6	5	0.37

t-Test significant at: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$.

counterparts on a series of Twitter uses, as shown in Table 2. Significantly more broadcast correspondents used Twitter to post breaking news (19 percent versus only 4 percent for print correspondents), while more print reporters used their tweets to promote the work of journalists from other media outlets. Virtually none of the broadcast correspondents' tweets did such promotion. Another use of Twitter, that of sharing opinions, approached significance ($p = 0.06$), as more print correspondents (14 percent) shared their viewpoints on Twitter than their broadcast colleagues (only 6 percent).

The third question asked how correspondents present themselves on Twitter and how active and savvy they are. Descriptive analysis found that 77 percent of the Twitter profiles introduced the correspondents as employees of their news organization. About 16 percent of the accounts provided no bio whatsoever, while in the remaining 7 percent of accounts reporters attempted to distance themselves from their employers. Only 43 percent of profiles included a professional photo of the correspondent. Half (50 percent) of the accounts had a personal photo instead, while 7 percent used a symbol or other image not related to the correspondent or no photo at all. About 35 percent of the Twitter accounts provided a link to the news outlet for which the correspondents were working, and 34 percent linked to personal websites, blogs, or Facebook pages. The remaining 31 percent provided no link under bio. Crosstab analysis found that print and broadcast correspondents differed significantly only in the extent to which they linked to a personal site (47 percent of print reporter accounts versus 24 percent of broadcast reporter accounts; $\chi^2 = 4.941$, $p < 0.05$).

In terms of account activity, correspondents sent out an average of 631 tweets since they opened their account, but the numbers varied widely, from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 4084 ($SD = 821$). *t*-Tests found no significant differences between broadcast and print correspondents or female and male correspondents. A better measure of Twitter activity is the mean number of daily tweets (number obtained from www.tweetstats.com). An average correspondent sent out 3.2 tweets a day, again with no significant differences

by outlet type and gender. About half (46 percent) of the correspondents had tweeted within a day of the moment the profile was accessed and saved, and 29 percent had tweeted within the week prior to the search. A good number of correspondents (19 percent) had not tweeted for more than a month when the study was conducted.

Twitter savviness variables included the extent of retweet (RT), reply, embedded hyperlink, and hashtag use. About 12 percent of tweets were RTs of messages posted by other Twitter users, with no significant difference between groups. About 18 percent of correspondents' tweets were replies to other users, and the results were uniform across groups. More tweets, 42 percent, included links to external sites. Print reporters were twice as likely to link to external sites (62 percent of tweets versus only 27 percent of broadcast reporters' tweets), and the difference is statistically significant ($t = -5.19, p < 0.001$). About 32 percent of tweets used hashtags, the Twitter convention that allows users to tag their messages and contribute content to trending topics. Broadcast correspondents used significantly more hashtags (39 percent) than their print counterparts (21 percent; $t = -2.51; p < 0.05$). No differences were found by gender. All in all, print and broadcast correspondents differed marginally in Twitter savviness, with print reporters employing more links and their broadcast correspondents using more hashtags. The group was found to be cohesive by gender.

To answer RQ4 about what uses of Twitter predict foreign correspondents' popularity (number of followers and lists) on the platform, the popularity scores were first analyzed. A typical correspondent had about 2465 followers, but the range varied widely, from 19 followers to 18,102 ($SD = 3872$). While there were no significant differences between male and female correspondents, broadcast correspondents were significantly more popular, with an average of 3397 followers, versus 1376 for print correspondents ($t = 2.93, p < 0.01$).

An average correspondent was listed 181 times, but again, the range varied from a minimum of two lists to a maximum of 1312 ($SD = 274$). Once again, broadcast correspondents were listed more (248) than their print counterparts (83; $t = 2.89, p < 0.01$), and no differences were found by gender. Regression analysis (Table 3) found that using Twitter for different purposes (to post breaking news or personal opinion, etc.) did not make a difference whatsoever on the number of followers or lists.

The final hypothesis predicted that interactivity and more intense activity on Twitter in general would result in higher popularity. Table 3 shows that linking to external sites

TABLE 3
Regression analysis of Twitter popularity

	<i>B</i> (SE)	
	Number of followers	Number of lists
Links in tweets	-23.02 (9.58)**	-1.81 (0.7)**
Retweets	-25.6 (15.8)	-1.79 (1.1)
Replies	-23.09 (14.5)	-1.34 (1.06)
Hashtags	19.71 (10.4)*	1.85 (0.7)**
Number of people the correspondent is following	0.83 (1.67)	0.04 (0.1)
Total number of tweets	2.41 (0.64)**	0.18 (0.04)**
Number of daily tweets	56.32 (259.82)	-3.5 (18.9)
	$R^2 = 0.46; df = 7$	$R^2 = 0.45; df = 7$
	$F = 9.59**$	$F = 9.33**$

Unstandardized coefficients significant at: * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$.

actually results in lower numbers of followers and lists, whereas using hashtags and tweeting more or for a longer period correlates with more followers and lists. Following people back, retweeting and replying makes no statistically significant difference in correspondents' popularity on Twitter.

Conclusion

This study investigated how foreign correspondents working for major news outlets in the United States use one of the most popular social networking websites, Twitter. First, unlike other groups of Internet users, such as politicians, celebrities, athletes, average citizens, or even typical reporters, it is impossible to discern whether more foreign correspondents embraced microblogging than other social media tools popular in the past, such as blogging, video sharing sites, or MySpace. Foreign correspondence is still an under-researched field, where scholars have noted a "fortress journalism syndrome," in the sense that we still think of it in terms of familiar and centuries-old news delivery systems (Hamilton and Jenner, 2003).

The three dependent variables were the correspondents' uses of Twitter, their savviness, and their level of popularity and interactivity on Twitter.

The main purpose of creating Twitter accounts seems to have been the discussion of current events. About 27 percent of tweets disseminated information about events where the correspondents were stationed, and 19 percent discussed current events in other corners of the world. Their journalistic instinct dictated correspondents to circulate information they found interesting outside the region they were assigned to cover, thus lending an informed lens to trending topics. They also used Twitter in a way similar to a wire service. Related to dissemination of current events, a large number of tweets (13 percent) promoted the correspondents' news outlet, linking to news stories produced by their colleagues. The same amount of tweets was dedicated to breaking news. Foreign correspondents tweeted as soon as they wrapped up an interview or after and even during events they witnessed. Broadcast foreign correspondents, perhaps more used to the immediacy of their medium, used Twitter significantly more for breaking news compared to their print counterparts. In fact, only 4 percent of print foreign correspondents' tweets were dedicated to breaking news. Surprisingly, given the social media guidelines put in place by most news media organizations, the same group of foreign correspondents used Twitter significantly more to express opinion (14 percent of tweets versus 6 percent of broadcast journalists' messages). The number is still significantly smaller than the 16 percent of opinion-sharing tweets of typical domestic journalists (Lasorsa et al., 2011) or the 58 percent of tweets posted by sports journalists to share personal views (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010).

A small number of tweets (8 percent) were of a personal nature, sharing tidbits about the correspondents' family and social life, as well as likes and dislikes. Foreign correspondents seem less inclined to offer a glimpse into their lives than typical journalists, who dedicate 20 percent of tweets to dissemination of personal information (Lasorsa et al., 2011). Even fewer of the tweets shared random observations or posted links to other news outlets. While data indicated that the majority of tweets posted by foreign correspondents shared news, only 6 percent of tweets took advantage of the fluidity and

interactivity of the medium to ask for information from followers, with no significant differences between genders or type of media outlets.

When comparing correspondents by those two variables, the analysis found no differences in uses of Twitter between male and female correspondents but revealed that print correspondents are more likely to use microblogging for posting opinion and commentary, while broadcast correspondents break news more often. This could explain the differences in Twitter savviness, with print correspondents posting more links to external sites (perhaps accompanied by personal comments) and broadcast journalists using more hashtags (perhaps positioning their breaking tweets within trending topics). The most significant difference between the two groups, however, concerned popularity. A typical broadcast correspondent had an average of 2000 more followers than a print reporter. And larger numbers of followers were predicted, not surprisingly, by the use of hashtags and hurt by the use of links. It seems that audiences prefer journalists to “churnalists” of external links and expect original content from the correspondents they follow on Twitter. Also, a more involved presence on Twitter—that is, tweeting more or for a longer time, even if not on breaking news—resulted in significant oomph in correspondents’ popularity. Also, foreign correspondents seem to be significantly more popular on Twitter than typical domestic reporters, who attract about 500 followers on average, according to Lasorsa et al. (2011).

The group of correspondents was cohesive in terms of Twitter activity, with an average of about three tweets per day, one of which (or 30 percent of all tweets) being interactive in nature—a retweet or a reply. Unlike politicians, for instance (Cozma and Chen, 2010), foreign correspondents do not shy away from direct communication with followers.

Related to Twitter savviness, 16 percent of correspondents failed to introduce themselves in their Twitter bio section, making it hard for potential followers to tell that the Twitter accounts belonged to foreign correspondents. Even more Twitter accounts (31 percent) provided no link to professional or personal websites. That indicates that many of the correspondents still do not treat Twitter as a professional or promotional tool. In fact, 7 percent of correspondents tried to distance themselves from their employers in their biographical blurbs, specifying that the Twitter account is a depository of personal observations that do not represent the news outlet they work for.

Future research should build on the present content analysis and survey foreign correspondents on their perceptions and use of Twitter and look into the extent to which professional norms and routines dictate their Twitter activity patterns. Content analysis of mainstream journalists’ Twitter accounts (Lasorsa et al., 2011), for instance, indicates that typical reporters do not really “normalize” their tweets to fit old norms and practices, while research by Sheffer and Schultz (2010) found that content analysis and survey produced different results and nuances in the case of sports journalists.

Also, as a lot of news outlets are diminishing their foreign news operations, future research could look into the uses of Twitter by the transnational foreign correspondents of heavy weights like the Associated Press, Reuters, or Bloomberg, which maintain solid corps of foreign correspondents recruited from around the world. Analysis across countries might provide interesting findings as well, as foreign news might be in higher regard in other parts of the world, and research (Kolmer and Semetko, 2010) has found that it is not possible to generalize globally from the US case. The study of the US sample, however, is valuable in that it offers insights into how social networking sites are used to bypass the

traditional media channels and offer world news to citizens that are famously apathetic but also use mobile communication more than ever. Also, more than 50 percent of the Twitter users in the world are located in the United States (Parmalee and Bichard, 2012), and the traction of US foreign correspondents' accounts on Twitter may predict similar evolution in the rest of the world, as it gets increasingly tuned into Twitter. Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Canada follow in numbers of Twitter clients (Parmalee and Bichard, 2012), and while the three countries follow the same social responsibility press model as the United States, they have different histories of foreign correspondence. It would be interesting to extend the research design to these countries, especially the United Kingdom, where trusted and established news organizations like the BBC and Reuters have historically employed large contingents of foreign correspondents. Canada does not have a tradition of foreign correspondence and relies heavily on international news agencies for news from abroad (Soderlund et al., 2002). Among English language-speaking providers of foreign news with increasing reach and influence, Al Jazeera offers alternative international perspectives from the Arab world and beyond. As the recent Arab Spring developments have indicated, Twitter is an effective mobilization tool even in regions with limited Internet diffusion, and it would be worthwhile to investigate how Al Jazeera correspondents use the social media tool for professional and personal purposes and with what success.

As scholarship adds to our understanding of the uses and gratifications of Twitter by various professionals, we can start teasing out the ways in which foreign correspondents use social media differently from domestic reporters and what caliber of followers they attract, in a media environment that laments audiences' shrinking interest in foreign news. In its Top 50 Trending Topics on Twitter of all time, for instance, www.tweetstats.com (as of November 2011) lists the usual suspects, like Lady Gaga, iPhone, or Michael Jackson, but a lot of slots are actually occupied by international topics, like the European Union, Indonesia, Haiti, Gaza, or the Iran elections, suggesting that Twitter might be an efficient tool to inform audiences about events around the world but also to pique their interest in foreign news in the first place.

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