

Politician-Journalist Interaction in the context of Social Media with a Reference to Studies on French Politicians and Journalists

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Abstract

This project work is aimed to explore data use on digital media based on analysis of a network map of social media interactions between politicians and journalists. A major trajectory in link between political system and news media is relevant to the changes in how media is produced. The interrelationship between practices of journalists and politicians has been growingly complicated due to use of social media for political communication (Metag and Rauchfleisch, 2017). Political actors, which have been positioned beyond the boundaries of media organizations have currently embraced social media like Facebook, blogs and Twitter as approaches to communication. Politicians adopt Twitter and Facebook as communicative platforms for purpose of private users or influencing the new media institutions (Larsson and Moe, 2012). Under such circumstance, journalists are currently confronted with politicians in a multimodal communication context, which indicates that they can no longer simply depend upon the conventional journalistic approaches such as interviewing politicians or participating press conference. Instead, journalists are integrating use of social media as daily task. This requires both theoretical and empirical understandings of the relationship and interactions between politicians and journalists as well as the overall media logic (Enli and Simonsen, 2017). The previous studies have focused on the topics such as disseminating and discussing news topics on social media (Bruns and Burgess 2012), journalistic practices with respect to Twitter and use of Twitter in election campaigns (Dumitrica, 2014). Given the changed relationship between politicians and journalists as well as the growing complication, the project works on a case analysis of French politicians' and journalists' using social media as a daily communication tool so as to offer some implications for the interactions between journalists and politicians. The project first discusses the main concepts and ideas relevant to social media use by politicians and journalists with a focus on social media logic, motives of using social media on the part of journalist and politicians. And then the focus is on applying the established literature to discuss how journalists and politicians interact as well as their relationship.

Keywords

Social media interactions; French Politicians; Politician-Journalist Interaction.

1. Social Media Logic

Prior to discussing the use of twitter in political communication, it is important to clarify the concept of social media logic which was found to influence the ways politicians have communication with the public (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Lots of researches have made attempt to address the problem from lens of mediatization. A major principle of social media logic linked with the present study is connectivity, an advanced approach allowing algorithmically linking users to contents and other users (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Journalists

depend on the social media heavily which provides great opportunities with respect to source relations and dissemination of media coverage. Researches have demonstrated that journalists adopt social media, especially Twitter for two major purposes, 1) collecting information, which include seeking for the trending topics, participating in related discussions on a specific political issues and retaining source relations (Bruns et al. 2016); 2) marketing contents like news articles, commentaries, self-promotion and others (Rogstad, 2014).

On the part of politicians, it was found that politics has become growingly mediatized and that politicians have placed much more emphasis on impression management and build-up of image (Maarek, 2011). According to Strömbäck (2008), mediatization of politics are measured through to what extent media content is determined by media logic or political logic and to what extent politicians are directed by media logic or political logic. Many studies proposed that there has been a process in which politics have adapt itself to the media needs, which suggested undermined autonomy of politics and increased dependency on media and media coverage (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014).

To figure out the problem, many have attempted to explore what motivate politicians to use social media. Literature such as Kreiss (2016) and Enli (2015) highlighted the important role of political marketing such as impression management and brandings, agenda setting. Chadwick (2013) suggested the use of twitter allowed bypassing gatekeeping process. The established literature has showed great interest to figure out the purposes of using social media by politicians. The frequent use of social media especially raises many questions with respect to the strategic public relations and image management. the Public relations specialists emphasize twitter can only work when it is adopted as an element of public relations strategy (Evans et al., 2011). In the context of politicians-journalists relationship, many researches have been conducted to explore the functions of tweets based on study of a set of politicians' tweets. It was generally agreed that the twitter is often adopted mainly for promoting themselves, which is quite similar to a conventional top-down approach to political communication (Dumitrica, 2014). Conversely, many figured out that twitter was simply used for exchanging information, debates or providing some insights for some political campaigns or policies (Golbeck et al, 2010). Alternatively some have identified that profiles mediated the purposes of using Twitter, whereas others have suggested the effect with a national context (Ausserhofer and Maireder, 2013).

Davis (2009) suggests that journalists and politicians should work together and engage in collaboration which is similar to the journalist relationship highlighted by Gans (1979). However, given that both politicians and journalists have aspirations to the badge of foremost representativeness of democracy and the public. Thus, they are required to sustain "tug of war". Otherwise, the relations between journalists and politicians seem to be a joint culture (Berglez 2016). This indicates that the complicated relationship between journalists and politicians.

2. Functions of Social Media from Perspective of Politicians

Many studies from perspective of public relations have explored the role of social media as a public relations tools. According to Shirky (2011), the social media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs can be taken as a significant tool for mobilizing the group to take actions. Furthermore, Shirky (2011) pointed out the receivers cared about the senders on the social media, seeking for information, which increases chance of activism. New social media outlets are required for politicians and causes, allowing them to obtain supports, encouraging participation and generating open and continuous dialogues. What is more important is that social media can motivate people to generate a setting much more easily where the barely motivated individuals can be effective without being activists themselves. Politicians adopt social media for generating new arena of grassroots politics (Axford and Huggins, 2001, p. 90). Another important function of social media identified by the established literature is information

disclosure. According to Axford and Huggins (2001), the open and public nature of social media allowed it to alter the approaches that politicians get connected with the public. Politicians disclose information on the social media which can reach broad scope of audience.

In the context of Slovenia, researchers have drawn their interest into exploring how social media has reconditioned journalists' relation to power. Despite that the conventional gatekeeping role has been normalized (Vobič et al., 2017), there is an important change in structure of news values. Twitter was found to act much more as a communication medium rather than political content dissemination. Moreover, analysis of the retweeting practices revealed there was a coalition pattern where journalists and politicians create alliance for ensure their relevance via retweeting to each other. On the other, the study also identified the existence of the traditional pattern where the key journalists and politicians were absent. These studies suggest the dilemma and complexities in journalists-politicians relationship.

3. Influence of Politicians' Tweets on Journalists

In addition, many have explored influence of twitter on journalists. When analyzing the impact of Twitter on journalistic work, the concepts, agency-building and information subsidies, are highlighted. Agenda-building is about the overall process of developing mass media agenda and the ways media and journalists choose and use information and information sources (Nisbet 2008). This process consists of a variety of groups such as politicians, journalists and the public (Kioussis et al. 2013). Information subsidy refers to an attempt of producing influence over others' acts by controlling their access to and using information that is associated with actions. If information in the media coverage is directly sourced from the twitter rather than being searched by the journalists themselves, it can be taken as information subsidies (Fahmy et al. 2011). Information subsidies are highly relevant as information disclosed by politicians capture the media without being assessed by journalists.

The information subsidy approach primarily takes into account the one-directional influence, that is, influence flowing from politicians to journalists. Political communications literature (Kioussis et al. 2015) has used the approach to explore impact of political public, to explore the impact of politicians' information on journalists' selecting information and ways of covering news (Lancendorfer and Lee 2010). The influence of politicians' tweets on journalists becomes quite natural as journalists need the politicians' tweets as the sources of media coverage. Nevertheless, there emerges another important question, that is, whether the sources from politicians have replaced the information collected by journalists themselves. Press releases on twitter are the commonly used forms for information by simplifying journalists' search for information pertaining a specific issue. There is ample evidence about the existence of information subsidies on journalists' media coverage. Especially in the context of election campaigns the researchers have confirmed that the public relations efforts made by the candidates on twitter have exerted significant impact on media coverage (Kioussis et al. 2015; Lancendorfer and Lee 2010). Likewise, the findings can be identified in the context of non-election times. For instance, Kioussis et al. (2013) confirmed the influence of tweets by the US Congress on the journalists' media coverage. In this sense, they can be taken as agenda-building effect.

Most studies have confirmed that online contents such as tweets have actually become a major information subsidy that can be adopted by journalists. Especially, Twitter has been found to be a major online source of information with respect to politicians –journalists interaction (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Verweij 2012). Politicians on one hand have taken Twitter as an important communication channel and the platform for interacting with the public directly, overcoming the conventional gatekeeping role of mass media and approaching a large amount of electorates widely (Marcinkowski and Metag 2014). On the other hand, journalists adopt Twitter actively. According to Moon and Hadley (2014), twitter has been used by journalists as

an important form of information subsidies as tweets facilitates accessing information about a specific political issue. With respect to agenda-building processes what information politicians disseminate matters. In the majority of countries, politicians tend to use Twitter in a unidirectional way. According to Elter (2013), most politicians used Twitter to disclose information, but they did not get much engaged in active discussions with the citizens. Broersma and Graham (2012) figured out tweets played four major roles based on content analysis of press in the UK and Netherland. They found that tweets were adopted as a trigger of news story, a way of illustrating news events and an approach allowing voters to raise their questions.

Likewise, most agenda-building researches adopt content analysis for exploring correlations between reporting certain issues as well as their salience in the political context (Nisbet 2008). Nevertheless, these researches simply work on the final product of agenda-building process, but they do not capture the underlying motives from a journalistic perspective. According to Nisbet (2008), there were some uncertainties with respect to the actual inputs to process or details of the process itself. In this sense, content analysis fails to account for journalists' rationale and individual's beliefs about role of political tweets. Parmelee (2014) conducted a seminal research and conducted a semi-structured interview with American journalists to identify the conditions and motives behind the use of politicians' tweets in their own media coverage. It was found that journalists used politicians' tweets if these tweets can be easily quoted. The politicians' tweets are also used for helping identify other sources or when the tweets can help check facts or inform them of background information or when the politicians' tweets offer some new ideas for the media coverage (p. 446). Nevertheless, Parmelee's (2014) study failed to offer additional evidence about the function accounting for the journalistic adoption of political tweet.

4. Applications of Findings of the Established Literature to Analyse The Example

4.1. Functions of Using Twitter

The example provided by Frame and Brachotte (2015) and Frame et al. (2016) about the use of twitter by politicians present functions of Twitter. As indicated by Figure 1 the example suggests that Twitter have mainly fulfilled four functions, reading, writing, disseminating interacting. Underneath, Frame and Brachotte (2015) and Frame et al. (2016) emphasized Twitter played an important role in monitoring, interacting and information dissemination. Moreover, the data revealed that the perceptions of different functions vary.

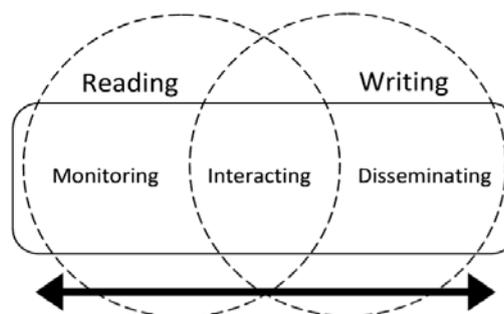


Figure 1. Motives of using social media

According to Frame and Brachotte (2015) and Frame et al. (2016), Twitter acts as a monitoring tool for the politicians for capturing real-time public sentiments to a specific issue.

The function identified by the case echoes Kioussis et al. (2016)'s highlighting the role of tweets in allowing the politicians to interact with the citizens. This is also consistent with the concept of constituency service proposed by Jackson and Lilleker (2011). Specifically, twitter allows the politicians to retweet and connect themselves with the online resources. Throughout the process, as suggested by Metag and Rauchfleisch (2017), the citizens have got fully engaged in the debates over a specific issue. The findings are congruent with Elter's (2013) findings that most politicians adopted Twitter for disclosing information, but seldom get engaged in actively discussing with citizens.

In addition, the concept of politicians as the producers of information to influence the public and journalists can also be applied to understand the example of French politicians' behaviors. Nisbet (2008) and Parmelee (2014) highlight politicians as producers in the social media context. In the case of French politicians' using twitters, the politicians heavily depend on twitter to disseminate information. Isabelle Attard considered twitter as "short-circuiting the traditional press networks". Moreover, the wide-spreading impact of twitter has also been found in Isabelle Attard's words, "By posting information on Twitter, you multiply its impact by ten, by twenty or one hundredfold". In this sense, Twitter acts as an important instrument allowing direct communication with the citizens. Moreover, in the example it is found that the politician Safia Otokoré uses Twitter as a channel to refute statements in public. This can be possibly explained by the concept of political mediation in the use of the social media. As suggested by Maarek (2011), politicians tended to prefer using twitter as an approach to impression management and a tool for building up image. In the example, the French politicians' use twitter is probably explained by these politicians' intension of impressing the public and establishing a positive image. The connectivity of social media justifies why politicians have to pay due attention to twitter and depend on twitter as what is highlighted by Esser and Strömbäck (2014).

4.2. Application of Concept of Information Subsidy Approach

When applying the information subsidy approach in the established literature into the example, it was found that the information subsidy approach emphasizing the influence of the tweets from politicians to journalists was not applicable to the example. The information subsidy approach emphasizes the journalists' taking information as a major source of information (Kioussis et al. 2013; 2015). However, in the example of the French politicians' use of social media, it is interesting to find that while journalists follow the politicians on twitter they only read the information that was perceived as interesting or original. For instance, Cécile Cornudet expressed that she did not follow many politicians as she believed that Twitter was most of time used as a communication tool by the politicians. This indicates Cécile Cornudet's mistrusting the information disclosed by the politicians. Information subsidy approach hence does not work in the case of Cécile Cornudet. The data also reveals that the journalists have much more interest in following other journalists on twitter. They considered the standard politicians tweets as facts-loaded and boring. This is manifested in Native's response.

I don't follow many politicians because they use Twitter as a communication tool and I'm sick of that. I don't want to let myself be polluted by them using it to send out press releases, so I avoid them. I mainly follow journalists in my area, or politicians or political observers like Dominique Reynié [professor in political science], people who've got interesting things to say: Eric Dupin [editorialist], opinion pollsters, people who tend to have funny or interesting things to say about what's going on.

(Cécile Cornudet).

[I started out by following] people I knew. Then people who tweeted interesting things, for example those close to Sarkozy to see what they were saying about Hollande's campaign. I follow quite a few journalists and bloggers – it depends on their relevance

(Valérie Nataf).

Moreover, the example denies the information subsidy approach when it revealed that politicians dependent on journalists' twitter or took journalists' tweets as sources of information. For instance, in the example, it was found that Safia Otokoré followed specific journalists' twitters that are considered as a useful source, and she checked these accounts on a regular basis to learn whether the sensitive information has been disclosed. This is manifested in Safia's labeling twitter as "The new agency wire / leak detector". In this sense, twitter has actually been incorporated into the politicians' monitoring strategies for quickly identifying the major stories or certain topics under discussion.

However, the data show that politicians do not want the journalists who follow their twitter accounts to talk about much the sensitive or highly important information. For instance, one journalist participating into the research shared the experience about the head of comms responded to the journalist's tweet about political statements. Likewise, Valérie Astruc reported that Hollande showed satisfaction with him simply because he tweeted not important information. This can be probably explained by the concept of political mediatisation. The example about the French politicians and journalists showed that journalists have comparatively a wide network. This indicates that information posted by the journalists about the politicians will be accessed by the followers of the journalists' accounts. In other words, the content posted by the journalists would undoubtedly influence widely the twitter users whose responses to the tweets may affect the ways the politicians are perceived in the public' mind and what attitude they hold towards the politicians. For those politicians leveraging the social media as an image establishment and impression build-up, they would probably attach much more importance to what information they disclose on twitter and what journalists talk about them on the twitter.

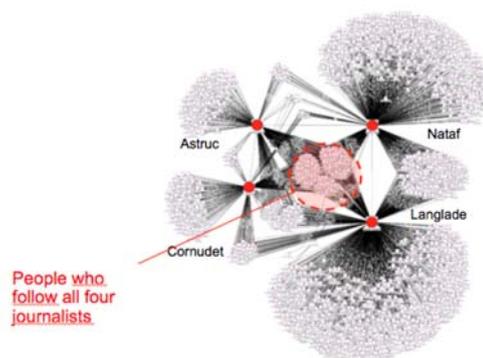


Figure 2. Relational Networks on Twitter: Followers of the journalists

Source: ppt EXAMPLE

5. Limitations of Media of Logic

In addition, the example can be interpreted with the logic of social media. While the social media is featured by connectivity, it also generates limits. Scandals generated by the tweets suggest the social and symbolic restrictions of Twitter as a political public relations tool. Lancendorfer and Lee (2010) suggested twitter as a highly violent media. The connectivity of social media facilitates spread of verbal violence. In the traditional media, the feeling of resentment or conflicts among the public cannot be seen on TV or personal social network, but the use of twitter allows them to post the disagreement and anger directly by following specific politicians' Twitter account. In the example, it is found that Safia Otokore experienced racial and sexual

assault. Generally speaking, female politicians are much more vulnerable to insults. Quote from Safia Otokore well demonstrates the limitations of use of social media. This indicates the political communication and the social media are incompatible. The domain of political system is featured by verbal jousting, but there is a strict code. However, in the social media system, the logic of social media emphasizes freedom and anonymity. Any interaction is based on freedom, and there is no differentiation. Twitter is totally open and instantaneous. There is no mediating gatekeeper. These features drive the politicians to use twitter as a public relations tool, however, these features make the politicians extremely close to the public, which increases the exposure of the politicians. The verbal violence is a challenge regarding public relations. It remains to further explore how to avoid the verbal violence, how to reduce the impact to the minimum.

Twitter abolishes differences, removes barriers between elected representatives, ministers and presidents. Everybody is equal so we address whoever we want and, if they want to, they'll reply. Except that we should never forget who we're talking to, that we can't make jokes or talk as we would to a friend [. . .] when in fact we're addressing a minister. We mustn't forget too quickly the hierarchical differences that structure society.

(Safia Otokore)

It is not my role to serve as a platform for people who are there to denigrate, who don't respect others and who express themselves in a vulgar way.

(Michelle Delaunay)

If [these verbal assaults] weren't anonymous, they would lead to prosecutions.

(Roselyne Bachelot)

6. Conclusion

The project has discussed politicians-journalists relationship based on the data about French politicians and journalists provided by Frame and Brachotte (2015) and Frame et al. (2016). The project applied the concepts such as social media logic, journalists' motive of using social media and politicians' motives of using social media. While the data was not generated from non-representative sample, the data offer some insights into how Twitter is used as a strategic tool for public relations. with the application of the concepts in the literature, the project highlights the motives of using twitter such as monitoring, information disseminating and interacting. However, the analysis of data shows that the connectivity of social media restricts the politicians' use of twitter as it exposes the politicians unprecedentedly to the verbal violence. However, the project does not identify the information subsidy, that is, journalists do not take much the politicians' tweets as the sources of information.

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