## Day 2, April 18, 2015: Research Panel – 4:30-6:00p.m.

## *All About the Twitter*

**Chair: Alfred Hermida,** Associate Professor, **University of British Columbia Graduate School of Journalism,** Canada

**Panelists:**

- **Frank Russell,** University of Missouri, Missouri School of Journalism: *Journalists, Gatekeeping, and Social Interaction on Twitter: Differences by Beat and Media Type for Newspaper and Online News*
- **Amber Hinsley** and Hyunmin Lee, Saint Louis University: *#Ferguson Strategic Messaging: How Local Journalists and Activists used Twitter as a Communication Tool*
- **Kyle Heim,** Seton Hall University: *Live Tweeting a Presidential Primary Debate: Comparing the Content of Twitter Posts and News Coverage*
- **Kathleen McElroy,** Oklahoma State University: *Gold Medals, Black Twitter, and Not-So-Good Hair: Framing the Gabby*

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**Frank Russell:** Thank you so much. I'm very excited to be here, in part because so many of you here are either in my Twitter feed or in my literature review. [laughter] So as we can tell from this panel, Twitter has become a very popular topic among media researchers. I'm drawn to research about Twitter because of its value for the news audience. We know from some of the panels yesterday, in particular, just how much consumers are getting their news from mobile devices, and we know that social media drives the traffic to our mobile websites.

So, some journalists were early adopters of Twitter, but many reporters and editors, those of you who have been in newsrooms know, were very skeptical initially about the value of Twitter. But in the past several years, Twitter has become a much more normalized part of a journalist's work routines. Today, most U.S. journalists are on Twitter, and they are actively using it to monitor information on their beat, keep and find information about news stories, [and] that sort of thing.

So, I'm a recovering editor from the newspaper industry. So, I tend to view media from a gatekeeping perspective. So, retweets on Twitter serve a gatekeeping function, because they reflect the information that journalists decide to pass onto their followers. So, as traditional gatekeepers, journalists gathered far more information than we could publish, and we got to decide

how much of that information and particularly what information was passed onto the news audience.

Social media, of course, has changed our role as traditional gatekeepers. When I was an editor, I felt that I was making decisions as an individual. That I got to decide what information to pass on. But in truth we know that journalists are influenced by both internal and external pressures on their gatekeeping decisions. One primary example of that is information subsidies or public relations activities, which make it easier for journalists to do their jobs. We also know that journalists, though, are skeptical of PR information, and they actually say that they are more influenced by other journalists than by PR sources.

So, journalists also have recognized the potential of Twitter as a tool for engaging directly with their audience. @mentions sort of indicate that social engagement function, because they indicate that a Twitter user is either replying to another post or tagging another Twitter user in their own post. So, journalists say that they're willing to interact socially on Twitter, but most of the previous research that has been done on this topic has found that even though journalists say that, they actually are reluctant in practice to interact with other -- to fully take advantage of the social characteristics of Twitter.

So, before I did this study, three of my colleagues at Mizzou, including Heesook Choi, who is an alumni—a master's degree alumni—of this program here at UT-Austin, we looked at how journalists -- how political journalists used Twitter during the 2013 U.S. government shutdown. That study was published a few months ago in digital journalism.

So, the biggest single use that we found for the 40 journalists that we looked at was to basically promote their own stories; either their own stories or stories from other journalists who worked for the same employers. After that, journalists were far more—the political journalists at least—were far more likely to interact with other journalists than they were to interact with information sources or other members of the public. So, that research, though, suggested questions that I pursued in the study that I'm talking about today.

So, the biggest question was, what about other kinds of journalists? Were our findings unique to political journalists or do all journalists sort of act the same way? And some of the feedback that we were getting from that study was that maybe we should specifically look at sports journalists. Some people who had read our study or who I had presented the study to said, "Well, I follow a lot of sports columnists, and they do engage directly with fans." So, I wanted to look at that specifically, in part because an article in last year's ISOJ Journal involved interviews with sports journalists, who reported that they valued Twitter in part because of the capability to interact/engage more directly with readers.

So, my career, I worked at the *San Jose Mercury News* for many years. And I specialized in business and technology news. So, I also wanted to look at business and tech journalists. If anyone should know the value of social media today, it should be business and tech journalists, I thought. However, previous research found that financial journalists were actually extremely reluctant to engage—to fully engage on Twitter. That study was from 2009, though, and we know that in the past few years, at least, that because Twitter has become a more normal part of journalist's work routine, I was hopeful that maybe that had changed.

So finally, the previous study we did with political journalists, we were not able to include any metro newspaper journalists in that study, primarily because we couldn't find very many metro newspaper journalists who were tweeting extensively about the government shutdown. But for this study, I was able to take sort of a more—I don't want to say it's random, because it wasn't possible to put together a random sample—but more of a mix between journalists who were very prolific on Twitter and maybe journalists who've maybe tweeted two or three times a day.

So for this project, I was able to directly compare Twitter use by journalists who worked for metro newspapers, for journalists who worked for the prestigious, big, national newspapers, like *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*, and the more innovative online-only sites, such as Business Insider, SB-Nation, or Gawker.

All and all, I looked at tweets from 27 journalists; nine each from public affairs, sports, and the business tech beats, and nine each from the prestige newspapers, metro newspapers, and entrepreneurial websites. I had the help of two coders who characterized the rt's and @mentions as referring to journalist's own news organizations, to other news media, official information sources, and other members of the public. The coders also noted whether the journalist added text to the rt's.

We looked at 900 tweets which were selected over a one-month period last year. Again, it wasn't a purely random sample. To make sure that it wasn't dominated by those prolific tweeters, I capped the sample to 5% from any one journalist.

So, here are the quick highlights of what I found. An alternate title for this study might be "What the Rest of Us Could Learn from Sports Journalists." The sports writers, editors, and producers in my sample were much more active on Twitter. They also were much more likely to engage directly with members of the public. However, they also were less likely to retweet from other news media, which I think reflects the competitive pressure that sports journalists have reported to researchers who've done previous studies on how sports journalists use Twitter.

Public affairs journalists—they seemed especially careful in their interactions on Twitter, which I think probably reflects the sort of objectivity or impartiality norm, particularly for journalists who cover politics and other government related news.

I was disappointed to find that the business and tech journalists were still not very active on Twitter, especially in comparison to the journalists from the other beats. They also were more likely to mention official information sources, which is consistent with previous research that financial journalists are more willing to accept information subsidies than journalist from other beats.

I found fewer differences between journalists from different types of media. The one thing that stood out—metro newspaper journalists were less active on Twitter than journalists for the big national newspapers and journalists for the entrepreneurial websites. I think that possibly reflects the reduced resources that we know that metro newspapers have been struggling with. And it's also consistent with research that particularly metro newspaper, daily newspaper journalists often view Twitter as maybe -- although they see the value in it, they wonder how they're going to find time to be active on Twitter and do the rest of their job, particularly in a time of constrained resources.

So anyway, thank you very much. And I'm looking forward to hearing the rest of the panel.

[Applause.]

**Amber Hinsley:** Thank you very much, Alf. As he said, I am Amber Hinsley. If you want to tweet at me or record what I am saying, my Twitter handle is Amber Hinsley, just first and last name. So, I'm from Saint Louis University, which is about 10 miles from where Michael Brown was killed in August in Ferguson, Missouri.

So, [I'll] just say real quick, this is actually part of a larger grant funded project that we're working on. It's interdisciplinary with one of my colleagues who is the coauthor on this, Min Lee, as well as some folks from the Sociology Department at Saint Louis University and the School of Public Health.

And we are looking at Twitter as sort of this umbrella of communication tool, but then also how it speaks to things like community resilience, and how were different groups using Twitter, what were their strategies, and what were they saying? So, this is just kind of one piece of that larger pie, so to speak.

So really, when we were looking at this, our initial thought was, how were journalists and activists using Twitter as a dissemination tool? And then we

wanted to look at it larger. And what tactics were they using? And how did those tactics vary in the week following Michael Brown's death? Specifically focusing the study on journalists and activists, because they were really the dominant gatekeepers and really had this shared gatekeeping that was happening in the week after Michael Brown was killed, and how they were helping to make meaning of those events in Ferguson, again, in the week after Brown was killed.

So, specifically with local journalists and activists, we looked at local folks only. And that's so we could do a comparable analysis between people who were connected to the area. You know, local journalists are very differently connected to St. Louis and that area than a lot of the national/international journalists who were kind of parachuting in during that time and then leaving. So, we wanted to focus just on the folks who were there that, again, were personally connected to St. Louis.

We looked at, in terms of the journalists, how the literature indicated that they would act in times of crisis. And so this list up here is kind of just the big job roles that journalists enact. It's been validated by dozens of studies. And then looked deeper into the literature in how journalists tend to act in times of crisis and then more specifically on social media.

And what we found there is that they tend to still rely on these professional routines that are up here. A couple of interesting breaks with that is that during times of crisis, they do tend to break from that objectivity norm, and the public responds to that in seeing them actually more positively. They seem them as truth tellers.

And so, we wanted to see, how were they acting here with Ferguson? Were they relying on these job roles and acting in these kind of predictable ways that ultimately reinforces the status quo. And what previous literature had shown was that that's generally what happens, is they focus on the chaos of the situation and the confrontations and the arrests, and not on those larger issues.

So, our big picture question with this was, would the local journalists act in the same ways when the crisis was in their community?

So with the activists, they were really interesting in Ferguson, because they weren't part of an organized group, especially that first week after Brown was killed, which was the tweets we were looking at. They were citizens. They were residents. They were members of local clergy. They were local politicians. They weren't part of an organized group. And most of the activist literature focuses on non-profit organizations and other organized organizations. And in this case, Ferguson was really unique, because we didn't have that happening here.

And so, we wanted to look at, would these people act in ways that were very similar or, you know, corresponding with how activists organizations and individuals tend to act in times of crisis? So, we did a content analysis from the local activists and the local journalists based on their communication strategies. So, these strategies up here is what we looked at with the journalists as well as the activists.

And so, [we were] looking at primarily, did the activists rely on these strategies? How were they communicated on Twitter? And then, did the local journalists use some of those same tactics? Was being local somehow making them more likely to act in some of these ways or to use those strategies?

We also then looked at message frames. So, we just looked at the primary message frame for each tweet and with the idea that journalists and activists tend to have different vested interests. And so, would their framing be very different? Would it align with those professional norms that we expect from journalists? Primarily, with those sort of neutral, factual information, what would activists do? Especially activists who weren't trained in advocacy and activist types of support.

So, this was a pilot study. I talked about this is part of a larger grant that we have. And so at the time that this was written, we had coded about 700 of the tweets. We are getting much closer to having our 4,000 tweets coded. So, we'll have an update to this. But it's looking like right now, with the preliminary analysis of the tweets that we've since coded, that it's very similarly aligned to what we found here.

So, what did we find? We found that the journalists and activists both were more likely to use original tweets rather than retweets, which really shows that both groups recognized the public's desire for new information during that time period when things were happening so quickly and there was a lot of chaos and questions. So, both groups were putting out a lot more original information.

We also looked at hashtag use. And 60% of the tweets that we looked at for this study had at least one hashtag. We coded for the first two hashtags that were present in each tweet if they had those. And we saw a lot of consistent use of hashtags, which really helped to spread the narrative for what was happening in Ferguson, coming from the journalists as well as from the activists.

And also then saw how the hashtag—certain hashtags—became dominant and really helped set the agenda for how people were talking about the events in Ferguson on Twitter. [We] had similar numbers of the tweets being favorited and retweeted by others. And that really shows that a lot of what was being said by these two groups really resonated with the public and likely helped spread that familiarity with certain hashtags. This also

ultimately shows that the journalists and activists had very common understandings and common practices for how they were using Twitter. So, kind of a level playing field for both groups, if you will, for their approach to the message strategies and message frames.

So, message strategies. Of that list of strategies I had on the activist slide a minute ago, these were the ones that had statistically significant differences. For those of you who are like me and former journalists, you're welcome. I didn't put all the statistical, fun math up here. [I] just stuck with some percentages. You can read the paper if you want to know more about the statistically significant differences.

So, what this says here is that both groups were acting as gatekeepers in providing information, which [is] not surprising, right? Journalists were more likely to do this, again, relying on those professional standards. We talk a lot about socialization and routine work in news, and this very much supports that. Journalists were doing that.

We also saw that activists were doing this at a fairly high rate. And so really, I think this indicates that they recognize providing information was their way of helping shape that narrative about Ferguson and what was going on there. The activists also—their desire to reflect others was reflected in their more present use of emotional message tactics, as well as the symbolic and organizing strategies.

And so symbolic, if you—let me go back—whoops—sorry—so the symbolic in organizing. So, if it was coded symbolic message strategy, it talked about them being at the protest or included a picture of protest or things like that. The organizing had to be actual face-to-face, so if was something like, "Hey, we're having a food drive at this church," that was more the organizing strategy, or, "Come meet with us for a Town Hall meeting," kind of thing.

Let me go back here. Oops. OK. So, what we see from this is that both groups, their message tactics were really closely aligned with the expected practices for both groups, which for me, again, was very interesting from the activist perspective, because they weren't trained activists. They were for the most part everyday citizens. But because this is what their understanding of what activists did, I think we see a lot of those similar patterns happening.

So, with the message frames, we had 14 original frames, which we collapsed into five, so that we could actually get some meaningful analysis happening here. And so, these were statistically significant differences that happened when we looked at the frames. And so, activists used Twitter to voice a range of opinions and to issue calls to action. [These] were some of their big activities with these message frames. And obviously, that aligns with the activists sort of general goals of challenging current conditions and promoting change.

For the journalists, they were a lot less likely to do those things. They primarily focused on conversations and objective reporting. So, with especially the objective reporting, a lot of this was real time live tweeting of what was happening. To a much smaller degree, they had some coverage of the larger issues of inequity and a lot of conversations like that. But for the most part, it was just a lot of live tweeting of what was happening at the time.

So, takeaways from this. Why should you care, so to speak? So, what we found from this was that they constructed their Twitter messages in very much expected ways in how they understood that they should act. And so, what does that tell us about how people, especially untrained people such as the activists we saw in Ferguson, how did they understand what it is that they are doing?

Information sharing. This was real interesting. It ties to a term coined by Zizi Papacharissi and her coauthor De Fatima Oliveira called *instantaneity*—combination of instantaneous and spontaneous, which really what they're talking about is live tweeting of events. And so, what's happening with that is you're getting an incomplete narrative, because there's not time to reflect, and it's purely reactionary. And that's a lot of what we saw happening in Ferguson, especially in that first week. And so, journalists and activists used the relatively safe roles of crafting messages in this time period after Ferguson.

So real quick, [I] just want to talk about some further research that we're doing, because I said, you know, it's part of a large grant. We just finished a paper looking specifically at favorites and retweets, and some of the interesting things that we're seeing with that. Looking at those in terms of retweeting and favoriting as a media use motivation.

So for those of you familiar with uses and gratifications, we did a content analysis study applying those and citing some other studies that have done the same thing. Most often, again, saw information tweets of what was being retweeted. We found a very fine line for the activists in informational—I'm sorry—in opinion and emotional tweets. People would retweet and favorite opinion tweets, but they would not do the same things for emotional statements. I can talk later about what those are.

And the last thing we found from that was a cognitive difference that the audience is making in what they are favoriting and retweeting. That there were certain messages were more likely to be favorited, but not retweeted. And so I'm really interested to dig more into why and how that was happening.

So, thank you very much for your time. Like I said, if you have any questions, that was my contact info. You can tweet me or email me. And I'm happy to talk about it more later. So, thank you very much.

[Applause.]

**Kyle Heim:** OK. Good afternoon. So, as I look out at the audience here, I obviously see a lot of screens. I see a lot of live tweeting going on. And I would guess that because this is the last session of the symposium that there are some people who have bailed and are not here physically, but they may still be following what's going on, on the Twitter stream, with the idea that if something important happens during this session, it will surface in their Twitter stream.

And I think increasingly, that is the case with a lot of public events; particularly, televised events, such as presidential debates, which is the focus of my study. Increasingly, we see a lot of people who rely on their social media streams literally as news feeds with the idea that maybe they don't actually need to watch the debate, because everything they need to know can be found in their Twitter stream.

And given the fact that people are increasingly relying on social media as their primary news source for these kinds of events, I think it's important for us to understand a little bit more about what those Twitter streams look like and how they might be different from or similar to mainstream news coverage. So, that's what I set out to do in this particular study—comparing the content of the live tweets during a presidential primary debate with traditional news coverage. And one of the reasons that I decided to opt for a political focus is because there is a large body of literature out there that has looked at how the news media cover U.S. presidential politics.

If we go back to the 1960's, we would find that most news coverage was almost exclusively about the candidates and where they stood on the issues. As we moved into the 1970's, we saw the emergence of what is referred to as strategy coverage, with a heavy emphasis on political poling, or the language of war or sports to try to characterize political contests, or an emphasis on the staging of political events. And then finally as we move into the late 1980's onward, we see a third trend in political coverage known as metacoverage, in which journalists are writing about themselves and writing about the news media's role in political events.

And the reason why any of this matters is because there is also a body of literature that suggests that this shift in political coverage away from issue-based coverage to more strategy and metacoverage sends a message to people that perhaps politics isn't really about the issues or about the public good, but that it's more about power or gamesmanship. And that has been blamed for increasing the public's cynicism towards politics.

So, I was curious to know, you know, when you give the power to the people and you let them live tweet an event like a political debate, what kinds of things do they mention in their tweets? And how does that compare with

traditional news coverage? So, I posed to research questions. The first research question was focused on policy versus character. In other words, was the emphasis more on the issue or more on the candidates personal qualities? And the second research question was focused on strategy coverage and metacoverage, which I just talked about.

So for this study, I decided to focus on one particular debate, and it was a Republican primary debate during the 2012 U.S. presidential race that was held a month before the all-important Iowa caucuses. So, I looked at the transcript of the debate itself. I also looked at news stories that were published immediately after the debate on the websites of major newspapers and wire services. And then finally, I looked at tweets that were posted throughout the debate using the common hashtags for the event.

And my analysis was a combination of both quantitative and qualitative. So for the quantitative portion, I used a piece of software that performs what is called a centering resonance analysis. And I'm not going to go into a lot of detail here. You can read more about it in my paper in the journal. But essentially what a centering resonance analysis does is it identifies the most influential words in the text, which is not exactly the same thing as word frequency. It looks at those words that are central to the text that link together other words, and it measures their betweenness centrality, and it produces a list of those most influential words. And then I coupled that with a qualitative textual analysis where I reviewed the tweets, the news coverage, and the debate itself to identify themes that emerged.

So, just to look at some of the highlights here of the centering resonance analysis, for the debate itself, what I discovered was that many of the most influential words were policy oriented words. Words such as *issue* or *Palestinian* or *money* or *tax,* suggesting that the debate itself was very policy oriented.

For the news coverage, I also found a lot of policy oriented words that were highly influential. In addition, I found a number of strategy related words that were also influential. Words such as *poll* or *rival* or *attack*, suggesting that the news coverage also had a very strong strategic framing.

And then finally for the Twitter discussion. Now, this was interesting because for the Twitter discussion, the analysis looked very different. There were no policy oriented words. Two of the most influential words were the words *ten thousand*, which was treated as a single word in the analysis, and the word *dollar*. And some of you may remember this. During this particular debate, there was an exchange between two of the candidates, Rick Perry and Mitt Romney, in which Rick Perry accused Mitt Romney of changing his position on healthcare reform. And Mitt Romney said, "No, I haven't. In fact I'm willing to bet you ten-thousand dollars that I haven't." And that immediately blew up on Twitter with Twitter users thinking it was quite odd that he would

offer to bet such a large amount of money. And that really became *the* central focus of the Twitter discussion.

The other thing I found on Twitter was that there was a heavy emphasis on media-related words, such as *ABC*, the network sponsoring the debate, and *Diana Sawyer*, one of the moderators.

So overall, what did I find? Well, with respect to policy, I found that there was a strong policy emphasis in both the debate itself and in the news coverage, but not on Twitter. However, let me put a little asterisk next to that, because there was some discussion of policy on Twitter, but it was not about the issues that were being talked about during the debate; rather, it was the issues that were not being talked about, as users on Twitter wanted to know, why? Why aren't the candidates talking about this issue? Why aren't the moderators asking about that issue?

With respect to character, the biggest takeaway here was that the Twitter discussion was dominated by Mitt Romney's bet of ten-thousand dollars. To users on Twitter, that spoke to Romney's character, suggesting that he was out of touch with ordinary Americans. And interestingly, by contrast, in the news coverage, half of the news articles I looked at did not mention Romney's bet offer at all. And in those that did, it got nothing more than a brief mention.

With respect to strategy, I found that the Twitter discussion was very much key to strategy. So, it was dominated by a strategic frame. The debate was framed oftentimes as being like a boxing match, other times like a circus in which the candidates were the clowns, and still other times as being like a beauty pageant.

And then finally with respect to media focused metacoverage, the Twitter discussion focused very heavily on the role of the media. To people on Twitter, this was not just a political event, but it was a media event. And there was a lot of discussion in particular about the ABC moderators and their lines of questioning.

So, what are the implications of this? Well, at risk of sort of oversimplifying things here, I think that there are some positive implications and then maybe also some reasons for some concern. Certainly, the Twitter stream overall was less substantive than the news coverage, and maybe that's to be expected on a platform where you only have 140 characters to work with, but there was definitely a lot more focus on strategy than policy. And knowing what we know about that, that would suggest that perhaps people who rely only on Twitter to find out about these kinds of events might become more cynical towards politics and politicians.

So, I think Twitter is not really a substitute here for traditional news coverage. Those people who said, "I don't need to follow the news coverage,"

or "I don't need to watch the debate, because everything I need to know is on Twitter," I'm not sure that that was true in this particular case. I don't think Twitter is a full substitute. So, there's still a need for those kinds of traditional gatekeeping or curation functions.

At the same time, I think that we can look at the discussion on Twitter as being really a critique of the debate that may actually produce some positive change. So even though the tone of a lot of the tweets was very snarky or cynical, I think they carried a much deeper message, which is that people on Twitter were fed up. They were fed up with the contrived, artificial, scripted nature of these kinds of political debates. And they also felt that the agenda was being too tightly controlled by the politicians and the journalists.

So, I think there was also sort of a deeper message here that it would be wise for journalists and politicians to pay attention to. And I think if journalists and politicians do pay attention to this, that perhaps social media such as Twitter might help move us towards the next stage of political coverage.

So, if the first stage was focused on the candidates and the issues, the second stage on strategy, and the third stage on the media, perhaps the fourth stage may actually move us towards a focus on the people who matter the most—the voters.

So, thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.

[Applause.]

**Kathleen McElroy:** Oh, guys, well, first of all, I want to say, I do not have good hair. All right. So, good hair in the black community is essentially white hair—straight and long. That is good hair. It's also the name of a Chris Rock documentary on, quote/unquote, "black women and their obsession with good hair." So, when word came out that black women were criticizing Gabby Douglas over her hair, I needed to figure out what was going on.

So, we're looking at Gold Medals, Black Twitter, and Not-So-Good Hair. Now, my paper goes into framing, but we may not get that far today, because I want to talk about how news becomes news.

So, Gabby Douglas in 2012 wins not only the team Gold Medal for the United States, but she wins the individual medal all around. She's the flying squirrel. Here, you see her upside down. But somehow in the time between [when] she won the team Gold Medal and the individual Gold Medal, something was bubbling up, supposedly, on Black Twitter. And that was a hair controversy.

By the way, I want to give a shout-out to the people in the overflow room. You may not be able to read my slides, and I may have too many words, but email me and I'll send you the slides. That's for you guys too.

So, there became this controversy over Gabby Douglas's hair. And I want to get into where this controversy comes from. Now, [I've] got some theories and concepts because, gosh, that's why I got a PhD, right? So, one is diffusion of news, which is really helpful here. Chris Anderson, I don't know if he is still here, but he told me, yes, I was on the right track. Yes. So, he came up with the idea of how now news can bubble up from internet and from small groups to mainstream news sites, traditional sites.

The other thing I'm looking at is Black Twitter, and I'm using Brock here, who sees it as a social public. You're going to see I'm capitalizing it. Meredith Clark, who is an expert on Black Twitter and was recently interviewed for *The Atlantic Magazine* has a great definition too. It's a "temporally linked group of connectors who share culture and language and interest in topics with a black frame of reference." So, you don't have to be black to be on Black Twitter, but there are going to be discussions about blackness.

Now, I'm also looking at intersectionality. So, you're not just talking about race. You're talking about race in class or class and gender or any of these ways that you can be oppressed. OK? And this is going to become important, because we're talking about black women, and specifically black women and their hair. Black women and their hair are a completely almost political unit. All right? And if there are any black women in this room, you know what I mean. So, it is an issue. It is an issue in intersectionality. You are assigned values of race and class based on your hair.

The other thing I'm looking at is framing. And I didn't use Dr. Reese's definition of framing, which I did in the paper, but here though, I want to talk about framing and power. So, how we use these words to push domination an hegemony.

OK. So, I did a qualitative work. And I know a lot of you are using computer programs to find these words. I don't know if they're good for getting black language or what Meredith also calls "the hidden transcript of blackness." So, we're going to get a lot of papers that say, "I am not my hair," from the India Arie song. So, those are the type of things I'm looking at.

I looked at pieces that were published between the week she won the individual Gold to, I'll say, a week after that. I looked at websites, traditional mainstream media, sports, politics. One was Stroller Derby, which is a blog for moms. Because this controversy, every woman and every black person and even white men felt they could comment on this. But we're going to find out that black women own this.

I looked at 56 articles or actually a little bit more I've found since then. And I also looked at 1,500 tweets officially. I looked at more than 1,500, but I wanted to make sure that I wasn't misreading Twitter.

Now, what's interesting about this is black women own this story. Have you ever seen any news coverage dominated like this by black women? This is remarkable. They were academics. They were black journalists. That's Jemele Hill of ESPN. That's Rochelle Riley. She's a columnist for *The Detroit Free Press.* Her work also appears in *USA Today.* And we have an academic whose name I cannot remember, because I am old, but she was an academic writing for CNN. We also had 15 white women, 7 black men, 2 white men, 1 Latino, and 2 unidentified people.

Now, what's interesting is the black women all made the story about owning it, and also, this is our historical problem. All right? And this a biographical problem. I've lived this. I remember when I cut off all my hair I got a note from somebody. So, they all told personal stories about having issues with their hair. The white women were defending Douglas saying, "Yeah, you know, it's so hard to be a feminist. It's like Hillary Clinton -- never has Gabby Douglas and Hillary Clinton been seen in the same sentence together. So, there was this thing, it's like, this is what happens to women in the news.

The black men, interestingly, are going to be disgusted by this. And the white men are like, "What?!" [laughter] So, the Latino understood, because he says his mom wouldn't let him go out in a certain way. So, it's an interesting way to look at this.

Now, on August 1 when Gabby wins the individual Gold, it's in London, so it's on tape-delay when it finally comes on live in the U.S. And one writer for *Ebony* points out that this was an opportunity so people can use their second screens, right? Second and third screens. And they can share their spontaneous thoughts about Gabby winning. Now, notice he says, "Aside from some commentary about her hair, the tweeting about Gabby Douglas' experience was notable because [it was almost] completely devoid of Twitter's lifeblood, snark." OK? Here's someone who's following it as it happens. There were two or three other blogs that followed this as it happened. And they say, "Hey, it was all pretty positive." Right? And it's not just because *Ebony* is pushing a black agenda.

Now, there were people writing about her hair. My favorite is the second one, "But why Gabby Douglas got Frederick Douglas hair?" Douglas misspelled, but hey, "No struggle, no progress, I suppose." Now, so people were commenting, but as you can see, this was pretty much along the line, right? "I don't care…16 or 26, black or white, Gabby Douglas hair is ratch." Now, that's going to become a key, believe it or not, tweet in this story. So, there were people talking about her hair.

Now, but this whole story starts with Sporty Afros, which is a site about women, how black women should be athletic in spite of their hair issues. A whole blog devoted to that. And Monisha Randolph, who's a certified running coach, writes about the Olympics or at least this thing. And she even says like, "Gabby Douglas is a gymnast." So, she doesn't call herself a journalist.

So, she has these tweets saying, oh, she just sort of paraphrased, "She needs some gel and a brush. Somebody give her a hair intervention. She has to represent." Well, what ends up happening is Jezebel picks up this tweet, "Haters gotta shut the hell up about Gabby Douglas," right? And they talk about C. Renée as proof of black haters—this one tweet. So, you can see this, "On another note, Gabby Douglas gotta do something with this hair." Blah, blah, blah. Well, five hours later, Huffington Post picks this up, and they criticize C. Renée. Nine articles end up criticizing this tweet even though it only got two replies at the time.

And then all of a sudden there is a backlash. And the backlash is not about Gabby Douglas winning. It's all about the people. The second one—well, I won't even read it. "Y'all got weaves and wigs." So, notice this is becoming class oriented. [I] won't go through this, but you can see all of this is building. So, everybody is picking things up.

By the way, never talk to a journalist. Latisha Jenkins talks to The Daily Beast. Other commentators end up criticizing Jenkins, including this piece in the Raleigh Observer, saying, "Most of the people who are criticizing her appear [to be] black women." Are y'all crazy? Then a Detroit woman named Latisha, "Oy, somebody buy that woman a verb." So, you can see how this becomes a class issue. Now, *The Times* finally does this on 8th. *Ebony* says, "Wait a second. This is all based on a Sporty blog post." And then *The Huffington Post* actually says, "How does the Olympics turn into a hair debate?" Well, that's diffusion of news.

So, I did find some frames. And what's interesting is the black women sort of framed this as, "We have a problem." *We* have a problem. Which the other people sort of framed as, "Black women have a problem." You see? It becomes a class war. "All y'all got is weaves and envy." And then, it's also—this is an interesting point—Gabby Douglas is 16, but the black women treated her as if she were a child. The four little girls who were killed in Birmingham were not little girls, right? Gabby is called a child, a baby, here. But the most interesting thing about this frame is that we need to move her away from blackness. It's like Gabby should be golden. Gabby shouldn't be black. We shouldn't think of her in those terms.

So, what I came away with is, like, looking at how news happens. This is a story that sports journalists and TV wasn't the eyewitness. It was content produced and shared by the audience. The other important thing here is that we see black women owning this story. But what I find interesting is how intersectionality works here, because the black women who could have done a little bit better job about saying how this works, instead, sort of push black women to the margins. You know, there was so much talk about all these women who have straight hair [that] they also have diabetes or they're not healthy. In fact, it was like an effort to sort of say, "Hey, we're not like them." Most of the women who were doing the commentary had short hair like me or kinky hair.

So, the thing I want to leave you with is, as Meredith said in *The Atlantic,* you know, Black Twitter is as reliable as a man on the street. You don't do those anymore, right? Why would you pick up anonymous quotes and just say them? So, you can't use Black Twitter as a true black experience. You know, if you're just eavesdropping, you're not doing your job. And as these two favorite tweets say—and I think it pretty much sums it up, especially the last one—"Now this fake Gabby Douglas hair drama is in the *L.A. Times* and on NPR? Media, you are fired. And I still blame Jezebel."

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

**Q&A Session:**

**Carl:** Hi. Loved all y'all's talks. My name is Carl. I'm a Mass Com master student at Texas State University. I've done a little bit of research of my own into Twitter and specifically use of it by the astronauts up on board the International Space Station and before the shuttle program ended there as well. And I'm sure that you all ran into this in your investigating literature reviews, is like the resistance of established news organizations to accepting the new media and things like that. It's been kind of similar within the astronaut core. And I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about whether or not they should be encouraged to adopt it, whether there should be training to help them use this medium to be able to effectively talk about the NASA mission, and things of that nature. Thank you.

**Amber Hinsley:** OK. So, I haven't done anything specifically on astronauts or whatever, but in just sort of looking at them, I think, NASA as well as news organizations have struggled with having social media policies for their journalists. And so, this is now branching out. We're seeing this growing into NASA and other government agencies developing these types of policies and practices for their employees, you know, people who are basically representing them. And I think it's this same type of idea, you know, with that is that NASA is probably going to have to have some kind of training or something if they want to…. I guess it's how closely do they want to control the messaging and things like that? I think probably the best social media policy I've heard is actually something that someone said here a couple of years ago, which was a very succinct, "Don't be an asshole." [That] was really the best social media policy I've heard. And I can't remember now which organization it was that they said that that was the gist of it. And, you know, I think as we get more and more into this…. You know, we used to have to train people to use email. And more and more, we're not having to do that sort of concerted training, because people kind of get it. But as it spreads, you know, you see that across organizations.

**Kathleen McElroy:** To me, that seems similar to what sports programs have to deal with, with athletes. And astronauts are the ultimate nerdy astronaut -- I mean, superstar athlete, right? So, I think if you look at those tweets compared to the early days of Twitter, because now all programs have policy. But I would just say maybe if you were to do some literature comparison, it might be interesting to look at sports and Twitter, and athletes, and then astronauts.

**Alfred Hermida:** I would say, if you're familiar with Chris Hatfield, Commander Chris Hatfield, he was on the Space Station, took pictures every day. He posted them. His son was running his social media. He's Canadian. He did way more for the Canadian Space Program as it is than anything the Canadian Space Program has done. And what's interesting is he's sort of become now essentially the media guy you bring in to talk about science. But because he built up his reputation through social, he has a connection with the audience and also a reputation and trust. So, he's become this bridge between essentially science research and the audience. So, there's tremendous positives there.

**Man:** Hi. I'm from El Salvador, a news media organization, and we have the largest internet site in El Salvador. And nobody touched on this of the panel. So, I'm not sure it's a question for the panel, but perhaps you have some ideas. And it's about basically what amounts to hate speech on Twitter. We have to face in the third world…. And the colleague from Azerbaijan I think got it best [about] when somebody puts a tweet of the garment and suddenly there's a million retweets of that particular tweet. We have to face in the third world what I think universally is known as trolls. And it's a very serious problem, where the purpose of the trolls is to systematically denigrate and literally assassinate in character the legitimate journalist, legitimate people. Do you know what the Twitter world -- what [the] Twitter company is doing? I know the Twitter founder has addressed this. There is a program called Verified which we're not sure. Those of us, we're not—Verified—we're not completely sure how to route through this, but basically it amounts to hate crime. Yeah, hate speech.

**Kathleen McElroy:** Well, I mean, there is the woman who lost her job making a joke tweet over, you know, third-world countries, South Africa, I think it was, so, you know, there's a lot of trolling going on. I think in our particular subject, I saw some of that in mine. And I almost would say that the media did a character assassination of some of the people I looked at. But what you're talking about, I know is a severe thousands upon thousands Gamergate type of -- you know, there's a lot of trolling in that. So, it just didn't happen to touch my particular work, but I don't know if others want to….

**Amber Hinsley:** Well, I know that was…. In some of the research I've been doing, more with interviews with some of the activists and just talking to them in general, they face, I mean, they still continue to face a lot of trolls.

And actually one of them suggested that that should be part of my research, which is looking at the trolls. And unfortunately, Twitter doesn't have -- and no social media organization has a good way to fight trolling, because we have, you know, here in the U.S., we have free speech laws. And how do you balance that with people who are just horrid? What are the rights of these individuals and things like that? [It's] something they're still trying to very much work out. And so unfortunately, there's no good solution for that right now. And so, just continue to have conversations like this. It's important so that we're aware of this and eventually someone will have a good idea [chuckles] of how to handle this.

**Frank Russell:** I think that's a possible reason why journalists might be less willing to engage with members of the public who they don't know versus, say, official information sources or other journalists who they consider reliable sources. They're not afraid to interact with those sources in some way.

**Man:** Hello. I'm at the University of Texas at San Antonio. I'm teaching and researching digital media, social media, and mobile media. I wanted to ask this question to all the panelists to hear, what's the power of Twitter in terms of offline participation? So, your analysis of content is more likely about online participation. They are so active in that participation. There is a view called slacktivism.

**Kathleen McElroy:** My goodness.

**Man:** Slacker activism. They are really active in that online participation, but actually they are kind of hiding in the back, not actually offline. They are jumping up to the front. So, what do you think that it is really transferring, their active online participation to offline participation? What is your view on that?

**Amber Hinsley:** So, we looked at this a little bit with calls to action. One of the things that's important to think about is what type of participation you're talking about. Because we looked at some political participation literature, where it was activists who were in South America as well as here in the U.S., and they felt that social media was a huge draw for getting that online activism to start and then carry into offline into that real-world activism. But with the Ferguson study, what we saw was that calls to action were not what was being retweeted and favorited by the audience. And so while those were messages that the activists were really pushing out, and even journalists were, you know, also kind of delivering some of those calls to action messages with helping local businesses and things like that, that's not what the audience was retweeting. And part of that may have been because this was an international story. And if you're not physically in St. Louis, those calls to action are not something that you're necessarily going to connect with and retweet or favorite. And so, I think if we looked at sort of the local St. Louis audience, there might have been more of that. And so to answer

your question, I think it really depends on what type of participation you're interested in looking at. And so if you can isolate that, and then look at things like calls to action, and look at what the public is doing with those.

**Kyle Heim:** I would say, you know, in the study that I looked at, one of the things I mentioned is, I mean, I saw a lot of evidence, obviously, of people on Twitter who were using Twitter as a way to kind of seize the agenda away from politicians and the news media, and they saw Twitter as a way to give voice to issues that they felt were being neglected [and] were not really being addressed. And they really saw Twitter as a way to raise those issues in the public consciousness. And I think, you know, that may not be a direct form of participation, but at least it's a way of sort of getting those issues out there and sort of starting a dialogue, which I think is certainly very important.

**Alfred Hermida:** And I would say get them to read my book, *Tell Everyone.* [laughter] Because this is one of the things I find most infuriating, because when people talk about slacktivism, it's often not based on research, but based on, "Well, I don't think that," not based on evidence. And if you look at some of the work done around Egypt. They're using Facebook as a way of mobilizing people to actually go out and take to the streets. If you look at the work in terms of YoSoy132 in Mexico and the impact that had on -- the impact and how it affected the debate around the presidential elections there and the results that came out of that, if you look at these movements, what you're seeing is the seeds of new political organizations and a way of a generation that doesn't connect with established structures getting involved what have been called these personalized action frames and laying those seeds. To expect those seeds to blossom in the space of a couple of months is ridiculous. If you look at the history of civil rights campaigning, this takes years, decades. So, it's one of these things that really gets to me, so I tackle it in my book extensively. So I would say just get them to read my book and then they can talk based on evidence rather than on gut feeling.

**Jonathan Groves:** Hi. Jonathan Groves from Drury University. I was wondering—this is to everyone—in previous Twitter studies that have been done, especially with moving news events and live news events, there's often talk of influencers who pop up that are in the public that will quell rumors. And I was wondering if you've run into any of that in the work or the studies that you did. That you found that there were certain voices that had the ability to move the conversation in a certain way.

**Kathleen McElroy:** Well, you know, one of the things I will point out is that a lot of black, quote/unquote, celebrities or leaders refused to comment on the Gabby Douglas hair thing, saying, "I'm going to go golfing. I hope I'm not…." In fact, this one commentator, Bomani Jones, I might have gotten his name wrong, said, "Please don't let me be the negro of the day to talk about this." So, there was an actual idea that, you know, this is not really news in

our community, so we're going to step away. So, they were non-influential though influential. [chuckles]

**Kyle Heim:** I would say in my study, you know, I didn't specifically separate it out to look at the different types of people who were posting on Twitter about the political debate, but clearly there were some who were more influential and who were being retweeted more so than others. One thing that I noticed is that several political operatives got involved in the discussion, and once they started tweeting about something, it seemed to really spread like wildfire. I mentioned the Mitt Romney comment about the ten-thousand dollar bet, and that took off on Twitter, but then it really took off even more once a Democratic operative started using the hashtag "what10Kbuys." And once that tweet was sent out, you know, that hashtag was then spread throughout Twitter. So, I mean, that's sort of an example, I guess, of someone who was able to really influence the direction of the discussion on Twitter.

**Amber Hinsley:** Yeah. I can only speak anecdotally at this point. We haven't parsed out individual, certain individuals and things like that, but I can tell you just from the coding that I did and what I saw was that people seemed to be relying a lot of on the people who were already in power in terms of the activists messaging. So, we saw elected officials like Antonio French and Patricia Vines in Ferguson, who were quite oftentimes looked to as—I hate to say—the voice of reason, but really that voice of, "Let's calm down." Especially like, "This is not who we are," when the activists -- like when looting was happening and things like that. When the message was moving away from what it had started as, they were really those representatives and those voices of trying to dial it back and to get it back or to remind people, "This is why we're here."

**Frank Russell:** We've been looking at St. Louis news media tweets during the Ferguson in October and sort of seeing the same thing, that once an activist sort of establishes credibility with the news media, then depending on the news organization, they are willing to retweet those activists.

**Alfred Hermida:** So, I have a paper coming out with my colleague, Candis Callison from UBC, where we looked at the Idle No More movement in Canada. It was sort of an indigenous led, environment, left-wing movement very much in the style of Occupy. And what you saw there is that the influences on Twitter were very different to the people that journalists were talking to. One really interesting, fascinating thing when you looked at the influences on Twitter is there were a lot of celebrities who were influential, but they weren't your basically white celebrities. They were indigenous celebrities. Because this is a movement that has its roots in indigenous rights. So, we had a different group of actors that were being listened to by that movement. And in terms of voracity of information, there's some work that's come out of Chili and looking at Japan in that when you have a more localized event, the closer somebody is to that event, the more likely they

are to try to correct information. I'm going to plug my book again, because all this stuff is also in my book, *Tell Everyone*. [laughter] And I promise I'll shut up about it now.

**Kathleen McElroy:** Parenthesis, Hermida, comma, 2015, comma…[laughs]

**Man:** You've started a new drinking game.

[Laughter.]

**Dale Blasingame:** Hi. Dale Blasingame. I'm on the faculty at Texas State. I also have a hair problem. [laughter] I had a question for Frank. As soon as you mentioned that you were looking at sports journalists and interactivity, that made me instantly think of my Twitter stream. And of course, you see all the sports reporters talking with people or retweeting people. You don't see a lot of that from local news reporters even though they say it, like you mentioned. So, any insight as to why that's happening? Why sports is more in tune with the true power of Twitter?

**Frank Russell:** Well, you know, there is previous research that sports is sort of an exception to the objectivity norm. So, maybe sports journalists are more willing to engage with different opinions on Twitter than, say, public affairs or definitely business or tech journalists might be willing to do.

**Kathleen McElroy:** I was also thinking about how the way sports journalists use Twitter is almost like talk radio in some sense, in that they're willing to say, "Oh, hey, Mike from Queens had something funny to say," because you hear that a lot on radio because they're using a lot of texts and tweets. And I was wondering when you were talking about that. And plus, they're also going to do a lot of tweeting doing games, so just the whole idea of live tweeting creates this atmosphere. And I've done that. And I would tweet back to somebody who corrected me, "Oh, yeah, so-and-so is right, Graf didn't win this in '88." You know, so, I think there is that type of engagement too.

**Kyle Heim:** Well, and the one thing that I wonder, and it probably is sort of a follow-up study is, are members of the public more willing to engage with sports journalists than other kinds of journalists? And I think….

**Kathleen McElroy:** Hmm. That's a good point.

**Kyle Heim:** I mean, the passion that people have for their local professional sports teams or their local college teams might suggest that that might be part of the reason too.

**Alfred Hermida:** So, I have just one final question for the panel. So, given the audience here, what would you say in terms of the research, where is the -- what's the research that's needed to really understand what's going on

through all these various fields? Whether it's in terms of how journalists are operating, how certain issues rise up and get discussed, how sort of mainstream coverage of an issue compares to what's being discussed socially through Twitter, to how events like Ferguson get portrayed and that interaction between actors who almost become incidental journalists through what they're doing and journalists who are doing their job being journalists.

**Kathleen McElroy:** Start on that end.

**Amber Hinsley:** Oh, geez.

[Laughter.]

**Frank Russell:** Well, I'm sort of interested in looking into, what are the organizations constraints that influence not just journalist's Twitter use, but also Facebook and other social media? I think that there are other platforms like Reddit [that] seems to be a very under-researched social media platform.

**Amber Hinsley:** Well, as kind of just coming from my personal interests, basically, I've done previous research on what motivates people. [microphone feedback] See, I'm just not supposed to talk right now. [laughter] So, I've done research on what motivates people to share news stores on Facebook and Twitter. And so, I'm interested in applying that more, again, with the Ferguson research I'm doing, in what motivates people to go from being that more kind of passive news or Twitter sort of reading consumer to being active, and what motivates them to actually click that retweet button and add a comment or click that favorite button, and what's the difference for them? Like, what are they thinking? Why do they do one or the other, kind of thing? And so, just getting more into the motivational side of why people are doing certain things with the messages that they're getting from journalists and others.

**Kyle Heim:** One thing that I'd like to see more research on, and this is not directly related to the topic that I presented on, but it's just how citizen gatekeeping works on Twitter. Because we know a lot about how journalists engage in gatekeeping. And we hear that word *gatekeeping* used a lot, but how do ordinary citizens, when they're scrolling through their Twitter feeds and they're being bombarded with all of this information, how do they make those kinds of judgments about which information is credible and which information to discard? What is the process that they go through? Is it very similar to the gatekeeping process the journalists have engaged in? Do they use some of the same rules or is the process entirely different? I'd like to know a little bit more about how ordinary citizens make sense of all of that information and how they engage in gatekeeping on Twitter.

**Kathleen McElroy:** I guess my main interest is not how media function, but what media do to other groups? And it doesn't matter whether it's online,

Twitter, you know, traditional television, all that. My interest is that in spite of or because of technology, there are still people who are underrepresented or not fairly represented in news media. So, I just always want to look at this new technology, not to say, "Ha-ha, you're doing this wrong," but just to say that a lot of the things that were complained about when the Black Press started in the 1830's, 1827, media still are doing, and there's still a reason why we have this need to have fair representation.

**Alfred Hermida:** Thank you all for your comments. I realize I somewhat put you on the spot. Please join me in thanking the panel for their insights and wonderful research.

[Applause.]