Agenda-Setting Revisited: Social Media and Sourcing in Mainstream Journalism

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Abstract

In political journalism, the battle over agenda-setting between journalists and their sources has been described using many metaphors and concepts. Herbert Gans saw it as a dance where the two parties competed for leadership, arguing that sources usually got the lead. We address the question of how social media, in particular Twitter, contribute to media agenda-building and agenda-setting by looking at how tweets are sourced in election campaign coverage in Australia, Norway and Sweden. Our findings show that the popularity of elite political sources is a common characteristic across all countries and media. Sourcing from Twitter reinforces the power of the political elites to set the agenda of the news media – they are indeed "still leading the dance". Twitter content travels to the news media as opinions, comments, announcements, factual statements, and photos. Still, there are variations that must be explained both by reference to different political and cultural characteristics of the three countries, as well as by the available resources and journalistic profiles of each media outlet.

Introduction

"Who sets the media agenda?" is a particularly vital question in agenda-setting studies, argues Maxwell McCombs (2014). He points to three key elements: major and powerful sources, other news organizations, and journalistic norms. We address the question of how social media, in this case Twitter, contribute to media agenda-building and agenda-setting by looking at how tweets

are sourced in election campaign coverage in three different countries: Australia, Norway, and Sweden.

In political journalism, the battle over agenda-setting between journalists and their sources has been described using many metaphors and concepts (Davis 2009). Herbert Gans, for instance, saw it as a dance where the two parties competed for leadership, arguing that sources usually got the lead (Gans 1980). Norwegian sociologist Gudmund Hernes (1978) took the opposite view when he referred to the "media twisting" of political news, arguing that journalistic practices almost inevitably provided journalists with the power to interpret and frame stories. Over the past decades, the continuous tug of war between journalists and their sources for the power to define and frame news has been described in terms of institutional practices such as media logics (Altheide 2013) and mediatization (Hjarvard 2013, Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). However, the relationship is currently being renegotiated because of the entrance of digital and social media that change the practices of journalism as well as of their sources.

For journalists, social media have become news beats for picking up stories, contacting and getting access to sources informally or formally (Broersma and Graham 2013). For sources, in our case defined as political actors such as parties, politicians and the like, social media have become alternative channels both for addressing and talking to citizens directly and for "dodging the gatekeepers" of mainstream media by publishing stories and material that can be picked up by journalists or citizens (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen 2013). Social media are potentially yet another channel for sources to influence journalism, as they allow sources to control staging and content, and thereby a means to influence the agenda-building and agenda-setting processes of the news media. For both sides, digitization has increased the amount of potentially accessible information

sources immensely. This situation on the one hand may have led to a devaluation of source power as the sheer ubiquity means that each source has little exclusive control of information. Similar pieces of information may be accessible to journalists through more than one channel, thereby weakening source power. On the other hand, digitization has increased the number of platforms where stories break and flow. Online and social media have added to the number of potential outlets that sources can use to get their stories out, thereby reducing the value of access to journalists and mainstream news media channels, and increasing source power. Either way, the integration of social media and journalism may alter the power of sources and journalists to set the agenda for the news media, other political actors, or voters.

In this chapter, we discuss whether and how the agenda-setting hypothesis is transferred to an online, hybrid media environment where social media increasingly constitute tools for both journalists and their sources. In the first section we provide an overview of literature addressing the development of agenda-setting studies, and explore how the hypothesis can be applied in a journalistic environment characterized by 24/7 news production, increased citizen journalism, and news breaking interchangeably in mainstream and social media (Bruns 2011; Chadwick 2011, 2013). In the second section, we draw on and present recent studies of the extent to which mainstream media are sourcing information from Twitter, illustrating how media content travels across platforms. Our examples include comparative analyses of political news sourcing and intermedia agenda-setting practices during election campaign periods in three different political settings: Australia, Norway, and Sweden.

The Agenda-Setting Hypothesis

Agenda-setting is defined as "the successful transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda " (M. McCombs 2014: Kindle Location 2530). The concept was coined in the late 1960s by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, and their first seminal article on the topic was published in the early 1970s (McCombs and Shaw 1972). The theory in its original form was an extension of effects studies. For decades, research had shown that it was difficult to prove direct media influence on voters' opinions or actions. By the 1960s, it was well established that the media had less direct than indirect influence on the public's minds (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948; Merton 1949), and the development of the agenda-setting hypothesis filled a theoretical and empirical gap on how the media influenced politics and voters. The findings from the early studies of McCombs and Shaw suggested that the main effect of the media coverage of election campaigns was to draw voters' attention to and increase the salience of issues, rather than to influence voters on what candidate or party to vote for. Accordingly, agenda-setting as a hypothesis not only updated ideas about media effects; it also added a theory that was able to account for media effects not only on individuals but also on institutions, processes and systems.

Over the years, agenda-setting as theory and a field of research has been expanded and refined into several new sub-topics and research areas. David Weaver (2014) recently described the field of research as being expanded from work concerning topic agenda-setting effects, via studies of attribute agenda-setting and of the contingent conditions, to investigations into the consequences of agenda-setting. A recent development is the Network Agenda-Setting model that suggests that news media not only tell us what to think about and how to think, but also what issues are connected (Guo 2014). Concerning the fact that citizens now live with a variety of media platforms, Shaw and Weaver have suggested that the mixing of agenda objects and attributes

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from a variety of media to construct a picture of the world should be termed *agenda-melding*: "Agenda-melding is the way we balance agendas of civic community and our valued reference communities with our own views and experiences to create a satisfying picture of the world. Agenda-melding does not replace media agenda-setting, but rather seeks to explain why the strength of media agenda-setting varies between different media, groups and individuals" (Shaw and Weaver 2014: Kindle Locations 4562-4563). Methodologically, agenda-setting research has moved from simple techniques of ranking issue salience to advanced statistics and time-series analyses, as well as to being researched by qualitative methods (McCombs 2014; McCombs and Shaw 1993). In her review of agenda-setting research, Tai makes a slightly different distinction, drawing on Dearing and Rogers (1996) who pinpointed three major research traditions: *the media agenda-setting tradition*, *the public agenda-setting tradition*, and *the policy agenda-setting tradition* (Tai 2009). The present study places itself clearly in the media agenda-setting category, and even more precisely, following Wallsten (2015b:24), we are concerned with "agenda building – the process by which news outlets determine what to cover".

While the opening phases of agenda-setting research concentrated on the question "Who sets the public agenda – and under what conditions?", the focus shifted to the question "Who sets the media agenda?" from the early 1980s onwards. That question has linked agenda-setting research to a number of social science, communication, and journalism subfields, and increasingly to online and digital media (Johnson 2014; McCombs 2014; McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 1997). For instance, Tran (2014) argues that while Internet-related developments have not fundamentally altered the traditional understanding of agenda-setting theory, they change the complicated relationships through which the media agenda is built. In the political sphere, citizen-created blogs reconfigure the traditional power structures between media and citizens by

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influencing the media agenda and rising in prominence as both sources and topics of the news. Source-created content outside the traditional media has resulted in a more bidirectional stream of influences on the media agenda, although the traditional media have retained most of their influence on the public agenda (Meraz 2014; Meraz and Papacharissi 2013; Wallsten 2007). It can be argued, as Meraz does, that "traditional media is no longer capable of leveraging complete media agenda-setting influence" (Meraz 2014: Kindle Location 556). Nevertheless, the agenda-setting hypothesis seems to remain robust and productive in an online environment.

Here, we limit our discussion to three elements of online agenda-setting. First, how social media contribute to setting the agenda in mainstream media: this addresses the *agenda-building* capacities of the transfer of social media contents to news media, and explores whether the influx of news items from social media also allows for a larger diversity of sources. The findings of previous studies are contradictory. Some studies conclude that social media, in particular Twitter, make up just another arena for opinion leaders and political elites, thereby reinforcing their power (Karlsen 2015; Meraz 2009). Other suggest that social media may not necessarily diminish the power of elite sources, but that "Twitter has the capacity to increase the diversity of voices in the news by including both unknown and well-known sources that are not available—or at least not easily accessible—other than on social media" (Paulussen and Harder 2014:549).

Second, we place ourselves in the field of *intermedia agenda-setting,* discussing how items and issues travel from one media platform to another. In this respect, particularly the relationship between social media and mainstream media is interesting: intermedia agenda-setting by the inclusion of social media items in news production. Several studies have established that social media have become tools for both journalists and their sources (Meraz 2014), yet the degree to

which they influence the agenda-building in mainstream media is less evident and seem to vary between contexts (Bruns 2012; Burgess and Bruns 2012; Hermida 2013).

Third, in the realm of politics, the relationship between journalists and political actors can, as noted previously, be characterized as interdependent and as an ongoing struggle for control over the agenda. For decades, debates over whether media logics influence decisions, voter behavior, issue formation, and the way politics is carried out have been a favorite subject for political analysis. From this perspective, the entrance of online and – particularly – social media, providing easy access to voters and journalists, is another challenge to the power balance between journalists and their sources.

Political Campaigning and Intermedia Agenda-Setting

Political actors, whether they represent parties, organizations, or NGOs, often state that one main reason for seeking media attention is to set the agenda for the media, the public and, in times of elections, for the campaigns. Studies of election campaign communication in Western democracies show that from the mid-1990s websites and other online channels were included among campaigning tools, expanding to encompass a large number of other web-based communication strategies such as candidate blogs, campaign websites, and online political advertisements. Politicians and parties have continuously adapted and specialized their techniques and messages – from press releases to strategic leaks – to contemporary journalism and media formats. This adaptation, or mediatization, of politics also includes parties' and politicians' use of websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and numerous other social media platforms (Bruns and Burgess 2011; Karlsen 2011; Kiousis, Soo-Yeon, McDevitt, and Ostrowski 2009; Martin 2014; Skogerbø and Karlsen 2014; Tedesco 2005; Tran 2014; Xenos 2005).

While some of these studies indicate that the adaptation to media formats, as well as adoption of techniques to bypass the gatekeepers, for example of social media, give sources the upper hand in setting the agenda of political journalism, others find that the processes of influence are more difficult to nail down. In line with Gans's original assertion that sources "lead the dance", Broersma and Graham (2013) argue that the entrance of online and social media has shifted the balance of power in the sources' favor. By using social media as channels for direct communication with the public, sources can publish or withhold information on any platform and within any period that they prefer. Previous studies have also supported this view: Meraz concluded that political blogs represented new arenas for mainstream media actors, in fact favoring established sources (Meraz 2009). Wallsten, on the other hand, suggests that the agenda-setting powers of social media sources and mainstream media are less obvious. He sees political blogs as "a high-speed, two-way street rather than a slow-moving, one-way road leading from media coverage to blog discussion or vice versa" (Wallsten 2007:567). Taking a more cautious view on the importance of social media to news production, Wallsten follows up the same point in his study of how Twitter was used as a source by leading US newspapers during the 2012 presidential election campaign, arguing that social media are important but not taking over as agenda-setting sources (Wallsten 2015b). Chadwick describes a cyclical relationship between mainstream and social media in the breaking of news stories: news break, are commented on and added to, on social media as well as on news media platforms (Chadwick 2011). In Norway, studies of the way that content travels from political candidates' social media accounts to newspapers show a rather moderate transfer of items and issues (Ingebretsen 2014; Skogerbø and Krumsvik 2014).

The Impact of Culture and Politics on Agenda-Setting

So far, there exist few comparative studies of the role of social media in agenda-setting processes. McCombs indicates that cultural frames may impact on agenda-setting (M. McCombs 2014), and recent findings suggest that the sourcing of news varies considerably between countries (Tiffen et al. 2013). We therefore assume that the sourcing of content from social media and the transfer of news items from one platform to another may vary across different media systems and political systems. In order to illustrate these systemic differences, we now turn to discuss findings from two different but related studies that examine four different national media and political systems.

Our approach to this comparative analysis builds on Kevin Wallsten's study of the social media sourcing practices of leading US news media during the 2012 presidential election, from January to November 2012. Wallsten studied the coverage of the presidential election campaign in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and Associated Press, and tracked the sourcing of information from Twitter in election news. This study found clear evidence that Twitter had influenced the way newspapers sourced election coverage. Tweets were cited in 289 newspaper articles out of approximately 5000 pieces of election coverage in these five news channels, suggesting that Twitter "seems to have had a noticeable, but relatively minor, impact on election reporting" (Wallsten 2015b:33).

Although the newspapers in Wallsten's study quoted tweets on a nearly daily basis during the pre-election period in 2012, there was substantial variation in their propensity to cite Twitter over time. The number of articles mentioning Twitter fluctuated considerably between January and November. Specifically, journalists were likely to supplement their election coverage with tweets in the immediate lead-up to and aftermath of major campaign and media events, e.g. the

Super Tuesday primaries, the presidential debates, and the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

Further, Wallsten found that the American journalists were concerned primarily with the tweets of political elites. His findings also provided evidence that there are important cross-national differences in how "old media" are responding to social media. Broersma and Graham (2012) found that British newspapers were more likely to quote the tweets of non-elite actors than the tweets of political leaders, and that most of the cited tweets were opinionated arguments. Dutch papers, by contrast, largely eschewed non-elite and opinionated tweets in favor of factual statements made by tweeting politicians. Wallsten's findings suggest that American newspapers were travelling a different path compared to their British and Dutch counterparts. Specifically, U.S. newspapers were mimicking the Dutch media's dependence on elites while also following the British media's tendency to cite opinionated tweets. These findings provide a compelling reminder of how important cross-national differences can be in shaping the impact of social media on news coverage (Wallsten 2015b).

Intermedia Agenda-Setting in Different Settings: Australia, Norway, and Sweden

Our aim in the following discussion is to extend Wallsten's research by complementing it with further analysis of similar data drawn from three media environments outside the United States. For this, we are using data on the social media sourcing practices of major news organizations in Australia, Norway, and Sweden. Although located in opposite parts of the globe, these countries have a number of common characteristics. They are all, in global terms, small states in terms of population, if not in territorial size, and are highly industrialized welfare states that on average score highly also on social and economic indices.

They are also constitutional monarchies organized as multi-party parliamentary democracies with public service broadcasting systems. The public broadcasters in each country play major roles both in news production and in providing citizens with a full range of programming. Their market positions against commercial competitors vary somewhat across the three national media systems; however, they are key producers of nation-wide political and election news, and important sources of information for voters, as are the local, regional, and nationwide newspapers (and their respective websites). In addition to the news media, online, mobile and social media are ubiquitous in all three countries. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and other platforms, are in all three cases employed by parties, politicians and journalists, as well as by citizens.

However, there are also significant differences. Australia is a federal state with some 23 million citizens, with a bicameral federal parliament. Elections to the lower house, the House of Representatives, take place every three years and follow the Westminster model, where only one candidate is elected from each constituency in a "first-past-the-post" system. The Westminster system results in a strong focus on a two-party system dominated by the Australian Labor Party and the (essentially permanent) Coalition between the conservative Liberal and National Parties. Australia's preferential voting system adds further complexity to the electoral system. This trait distinguishes Australia markedly from Scandinavia, as does the fact that Australia is one of a very few countries in the world where voting is mandatory and failure to vote can incur fines; this results in a substantially higher voter turn-out in each election, compared to most other nations.

By contrast, Norway and Sweden have some five and ten million citizens respectively. Both have parliamentary governments, stable multiparty systems and well-organized membership parties. The electoral systems include direct elections and proportional representation. The systems are somewhat different in Norway and Sweden, to the effect that the Swedish system benefits smaller parties less than the Norwegian one. Political power shifts between the Non-Socialist and the Socialist party blocs pending election results. Formations of coalition governments have been the normal practice on the Non-Socialist side of the political spectrum since the 1960s; however, there is a shorter history of coalition formation on the Socialist side. Minority governments and minority coalitions are quite common in both countries.

In Norway and Sweden, the regional party organizations nominate the candidates. In other words, the election systems are party-centric, not candidate-centric; in effect, this means that once the nominations are made, voters are left with a choice between the parties' lists as a whole, not between individual candidates. Further, in both countries the parties lay out the communicative strategies in election campaigns. Accordingly, this closed-list, proportional representation system is highly different from the Australian one, which allows voters, not only party members, to actually influence the success of individual of candidates.

There are also some important differences in the shapes of the media landscapes across the three countries. Australia has two public broadcasters: the mainstream Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the minority Special Broadcasting Corporation (SBS); of these, the ABC has the stronger positioning in the television and radio broadcast market, where it also competes with a small number of popular commercial stations. The ABC also has a significant online presence, with its website ranking in the top six Australian news sites in terms of total site visits

and the top two in terms of news links being shared on Twitter (Bruns 2015). The Australian newspaper market is similarly limited, and dominated by the Murdoch-controlled News Corporation (which publishes the only national broadsheet, *The Australian*, as well as a number of regional and local middle-brow and tabloid papers) and the Fairfax company (which publishes the broadsheets *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, in Melbourne, as well as specialist daily *Australian Financial Review*), amongst other titles. Both corporations also operate extensive websites for their leading titles, and engage in considerable content syndication across their respective stables of titles. Overall, a number of wire services, led by the Australian Associated Press (AAP), also support the news organizations.

The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), the public broadcaster, provides a wide range of programs on TV and radio channels, including nationwide and regional news services in several languages, as well as one of the most popular online sites, *nrk.no*. Our data are collected from the news site. Newspaper readership in Norway is high, although declining for print formats, and all 229 newspapers also have online editions. The newspaper market is quite concentrated and dominated by two large ownership groups, Schibsted and Amedia, and a few smaller competitors. Schibsted controls the two largest newspaper titles in Norway, *Aftenposten* and *Verdens Gang* (*VG*), both included in our study. The largest business newspaper, *Dagens Næringsliv*, belongs to a smaller group. Internet and mobile services are used by almost the entire population; to a degree that online and mobile readership of newspapers is higher than reading in print.

Sweden has a system quite similar to the Norwegian, although the public broadcaster is organized differently. While the NRK is an integrated corporation, public broadcasting in Sweden is

organized in several companies. Sveriges Television (SVT) runs a number of television services, as well as a popular online site, *svt.se*, which was selected for our data collection. Among Sweden's 164 newspapers (as of 2013), *Dagens Nyheter*, owned by Bonnier, and *Svenska Dagbladet*, controlled by Schibsted, are studied here; both of them are quality newspapers with rather different editorial platforms. The popular tabloid *Aftonbladet* is Sweden's largest newspaper, also owned by *Schibsted*, and it is included. It is quite similar to the Norwegian *VG* both in its online and print strategies.

Methods and Data

Following the lead of Broersma and Graham (2013) and Wallsten (2015b), our study was designed to study intermedia agenda-setting and agenda-building processes in three different countries with different political and media systems. We included the major news organizations in each country. In Australia, we selected the newspapers *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* (and its Sunday version, the *Sun Herald*), and *Australian Financial Review*, the online content of public broadcaster ABC, and the wire service AAP. The Norwegian newspapers are *VG*, *Aftenposten*, and *Dagens Næringsliv*, combined with the online content of the NRK, and the NTB wire service. In Sweden, our study included the newspapers *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, and *Aftonbladet*, the online content of public broadcaster SVT, and the wire service TT.

For each country and news outlet, we used electronic databases (*LexusNexis* and *Retriever*) to collect articles that included references to Twitter as a source, by searching for any articles containing twit* or tweet*. The collection period was ten weeks prior to the election day in the most recent national elections, which in Australia were held on 9 September 2013, in Norway on

12 September 2013, and in Sweden on 14 September 2014. Articles were manually filtered, so that only those news items which related clearly to the national election campaign in each country, and which directly cited one or more tweets (as opposed to more generally discussing the role of Twitter and other social media platforms in the campaign) were included. This resulted in 214 relevant articles from Australian news outlets, 69 from Norwegian outlets, and 76 from Swedish outlets.

Articles were then manually coded for content: here, we coded for the type of actor whose tweet was cited (including politicians, journalists, celebrities, experts, and ordinary users); for the function of the original tweet (providing facts, opinion, calls to action, jokes, or other content); for the role of the cited tweet in the news article (supporting a larger story, or serving as the center of the story itself); and for whether the tweet was used verbatim, or paraphrased by the journalist. Additionally, we also recorded the authors of the news articles (to the extent that such information was provided in bylines), and the names of specific key Twitter users whose tweets were being cited. The coding process was piloted, tried out on parts of the material and adjusted by coders in Australia and Scandinavia before being finalized, in order to secure reliability and validity of the data.

Findings

The results of our analysis show that the social media sourcing practices, and thus the potential for social media content to set the media agenda, vary widely across the different news outlets in each country, and across the different countries. For Australia, we found that broadsheets *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as wire service AAP, cited tweets considerably more frequently than the *Australian Financial Review* and the public broadcaster ABC. However,

the figures for the broadsheets are also considerably inflated by their respective recurring 'media diary' or 'political diary' columns that offer an irreverent or snarky look at politics and media, and which frequently build their commentary and gossip around snippets from tweets. Close to sixty percent of all tweets cited by *The Australian* were cited by its diarists writing such columns (fig. 1a). When these were removed from the count, wire service AAP emerges as the leading user of tweets in its articles. It is also evident that the status of the journalistic author appears to affect the role that cited tweets play in an article. Generally, and with the exception of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the diarists are more likely to build their pieces around a given tweet, while journalists whose names are used in an article's byline cite tweets mainly in support of a story, not as its central element. Unattributed articles were comparatively rare in most Australian outlets, and usually used tweets only to support their stories; the one exception from this rule is again the *Sydney Morning Herald*, where tweets are considerably more likely to be at the center of unattributed articles than they are to be central to bylined articles (fig. 1b).

Articles per Publication

	Article Writer
The Australian	40% / 27 ... 58% / 41
Sydney Morning Herald & S..	35% / 18 ... 45% / 24 ... 20% / 12
Australian Associated Press	100% / 52
Australian Financial Review	71% / 18 ... 25% / 5
ABC News	50% / 7 ... 50% / 6

Number of Articles (0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70)

Article Writer
- Diarists
- Named Journalists
- unattributed
- wire

Role in Article per Article Writer and Publication

Writer	Publication	Values
Named Journalists	ABC News	89% / 8 ... 11% / 1
	The Australian	81% / 34 ... 19% / 8
	Australian Financial Review	80% / 16 ... 20% / 4
	Sydney Morning Herald & Sun..	74% / 23 ... 26% / 8
unattributed	ABC News	100% / 9
	The Australian	100% / 2
	Australian Financial Review	100% / 1
	Sydney Morning Herald & Sun..	38% / 9 ... 63% / 15
Diarists	The Australian	29% / 18 ... 71% / 44
	Australian Financial Review	29% / 2 ... 71% / 5
	Sydney Morning Herald & Sun..	86% / 12 ... 14% / 2
wire	Australian Associated Press	50% / 37 ... 50% / 37

(0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, 90%, 100%)

Role in Article
- Centre
- Supporting

Figure 1 a/b: Twitter citations in election coverage over the ten weeks prior to the 2013 Australian general election.

In the following discussion, we thus exclude the diarists from our analysis, as their journalistic roles and activities differ considerably from those of other journalists; this reduces the total number of Australian articles we are considering from 214 to 155. Strikingly, in most outlets, the group of actors whose tweets were cited most frequently were politicians, followed at some distance by journalists. Only the ABC did not cite any tweets from journalists during the time of our study – but instead cited politicians' tweets almost exclusively, suggesting that the agenda-setting powers of political sources is indeed noticeable. Named or unnamed ordinary users were the third most frequently cited group; unnamed users being cited also included references to the general mood within common hashtags such as #auspol (cf. Sauter and Bruns 2015) and #ausvotes, and such references were especially prominent in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, while they remained entirely absent from *ABC News* articles. Domain experts were cited in some seven

to fourteen per cent of all articles across most outlets, although only one expert tweet was cited in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. That paper was the only outlet to cite celebrities, however. Finally, with four such tweets cited across all five news outlets, citing tweets by relatives of politicians remained the least prominent category (fig. 2a).
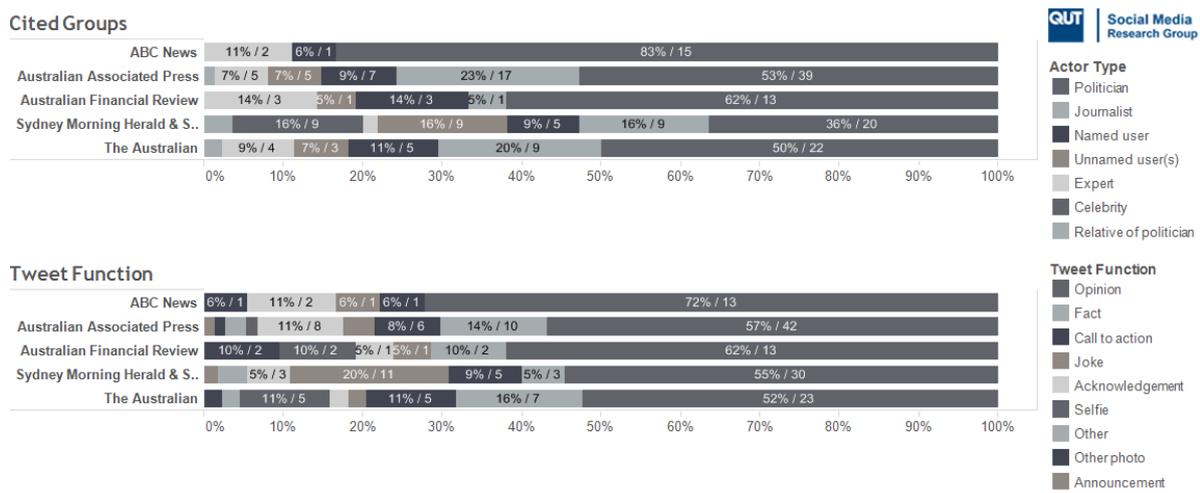

Figure 2a/b: Tweet citations and functions in articles in the 2013 election coverage in Australia (excluding 'media diary' sections).

Further, the tweets cited across all news outlets were predominantly presenting the tweet author's opinion; the next most prominent categories were facts (a tweet category which was absent in ABC content, and most prominent in the wire stories of the Australian Associated Press) and calls to action (absent from *Australian Financial Review* articles). Jokes were especially prevalent in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, while surprisingly the self-declared highbrow papers *The Australian* and *Australian Financial Review* featured the highest percentage of selfies and other photo tweets in their coverage. This may be related to the posting of a number of widely retweeted selfies by then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in the lead-up to the election (fig. 2b).

For Norway, we found similar variations between the different media outlets, but different patterns from those observed in Australia. *VG*, the popular tabloid newspaper, cited tweets in more than three times as many articles as the public broadcaster did, and accordingly *VG* was the only outlet for which we found extensive usage of tweets in the election coverage (fig. 3a). However, similar to *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the Australian case, much of its tweet citations stem from its regular column 'Sagt', which cites tweets but does not include them in an article context. We classified such ritual use of tweets under the 'media diary' category and excluded these articles from our further analysis.

When these 30 'Sagt' quotations were eliminated from the overall analysis, then, *NRK* emerged as the most prolific user of tweets, if still at a comparatively low level: it cited tweets in 12 articles over the period examined here, while the remaining news outlets published fewer than ten articles each that cited tweets during the same period. All outlets, with the exception of wire service NTB and *VG*'s 'Sagt' column, predominantly included tweets in articles by named journalists. Overall, the very low total number of articles citing tweets in the Norwegian media environment already indicates a very limited agenda-setting role for social media (or at least for *Twitter*) here.

Articles per Publication

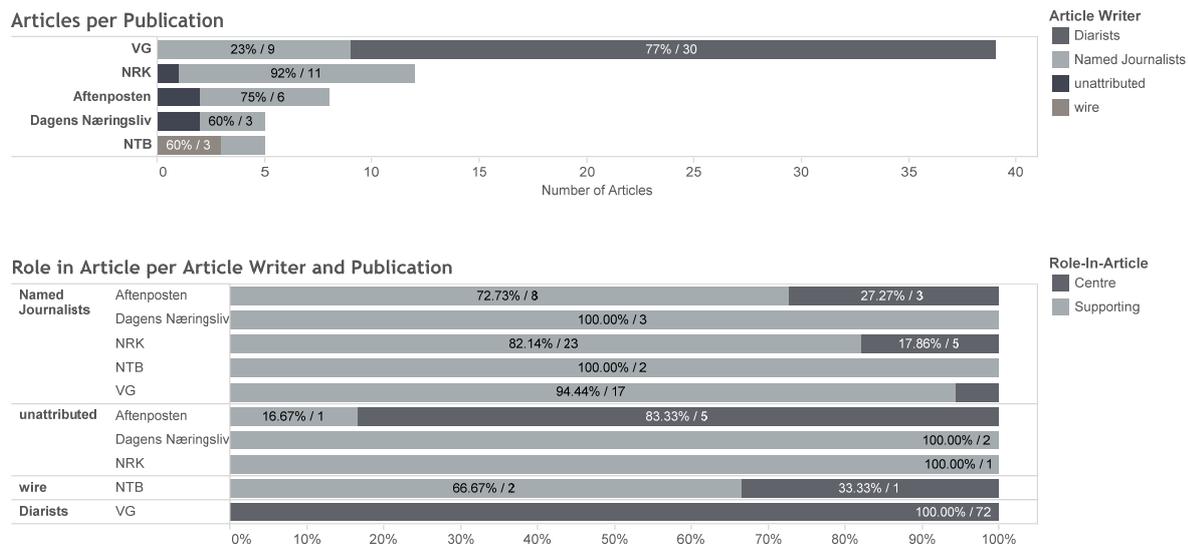**Role in Article per Article Writer and Publication**

Figure 3 a/b: Twitter citations in election coverage over the ten weeks prior to the 2013 general election in Norway.

Further, the role of tweets in articles is clearly related to whether articles are attributed to a named journalist. Of the 62 tweets cited in articles by named journalists, only nine form the centre of articles; conversely, five of the nine tweets cited in unattributed articles are at the centre of these articles (fig. 3b).

The Norwegian media varied quite substantially concerning their quoting practices (fig. 4a). In all media outlets except for specialist financial paper *Dagens Næringsliv*, which generally only cited a very small number of tweets, tweets by politicians still constituted an important category, but failed to represent the majority of all tweets; indeed, named ordinary users emerged as a comparable or more prominent presence in *VG*, *Aftenposten* and NRK (but were absent from *Dagens Næringsliv* and wire service NTB), indicating widely diverging approaches to the use of Twitter as an alternative source of vox pops. The relatives of politicians were also comparatively prominent in all outlets except for *Aftenposten*. One specific event resulted in a number of the

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news stories containing tweets from relatives: the Conservative Party leader's husband was quoted extensively and across media outlets for his tweets in defence of his wife during one of the television election programmes. Journalists, experts, celebrities, and unnamed users played a comparatively limited role. These figures suggest different journalistic priorities in the election coverage: the largest news media, which accordingly have the most diverse audiences, cited a diversity of authors on Twitter, while specialist *Dagens Næringsliv* and wire service NTB cater to different audience needs.
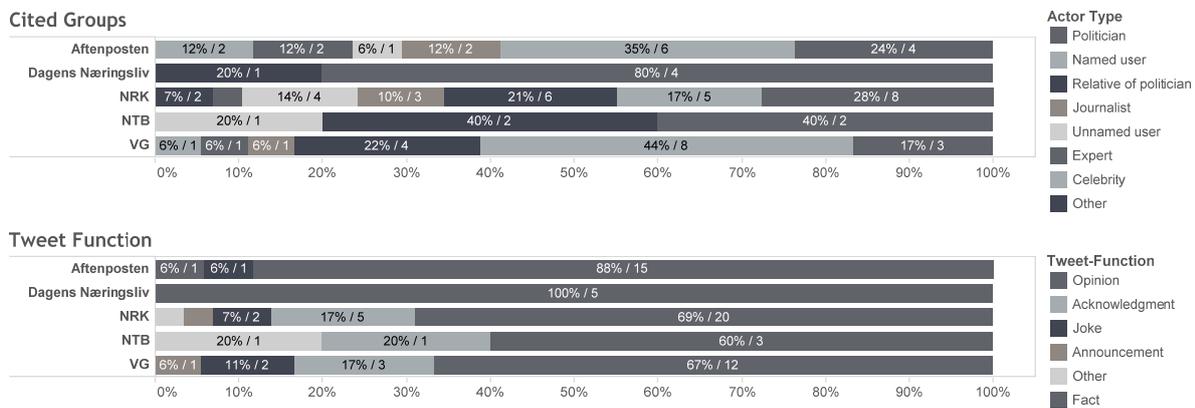

Figure 4a/b: Tweet citations and functions in articles in the 2013 election coverage in Norway (excluding VG's 'Sagt' section).

Even more comprehensively so than in Australia, the main function of the tweets cited in the Norwegian articles was to present the opinions of the tweeters, followed at considerable distance by acknowledgement tweets, which remained absent from *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv* (fig. 4b). Other categories (jokes, announcements, factual tweets) were rarely cited by the Norwegian media, and selfies and photographs remained entirely absent from the coverage.

Unlike Norway, and closer to the findings for Australia, the five Swedish news media had rather similar distributions of tweet citations. The broadsheet *Svenska Dagbladet* cited tweets in twenty articles over the examined period, followed by fellow broadsheet *Dagens Nyheter*, public broadcaster SVT and the other outlets with 13 to 15 articles each (fig. 5a). Most of the articles citing tweets were attributed to named journalists; the obvious exception to this pattern was the wire service TT, most of whose articles were unattributed.

Articles per Publication

Publication	Distribution	Article Writer
Svenska Dagbladet	5% / 1 · 20% / 4 · 75% / 15	
Dagens Nyheter	27% / 4 · 73% / 11	Named Journalists
SVT	13% / 2 · 87% / 13	unattributed
TT	93% / 13 · 7% / 1	wire
Aftonbladet	100% / 13	

Number of Articles (0 – 20)

Role in Article per Article Writer and Publication

Article Writer	Publication	Role in Article	
Named Journalists	Aftonbladet	87% / 13	13% / 2
	Dagens Nyheter	92% / 11	8% / 1
	Svenska Dagbladet	100% / 15	
	SVT	61% / 11	39% / 7
	TT	100% / 1	
unattributed	Dagens Nyheter	100% / 7	
	Svenska Dagbladet	100% / 4	
wire	Svenska Dagbladet	100% / 1	
	SVT	50% / 1	50% / 1
	TT	50% / 8	50% / 8

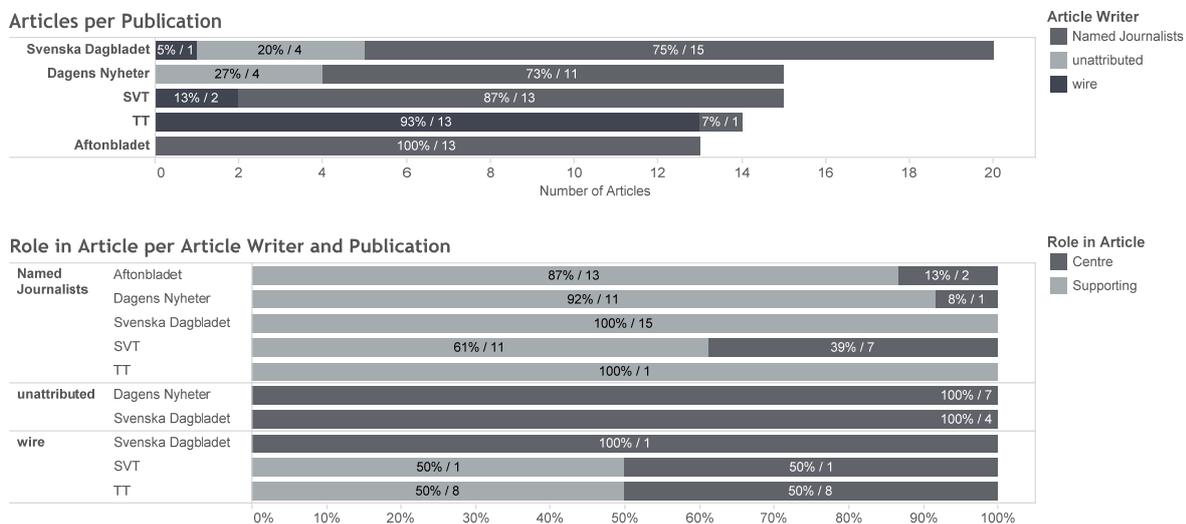Role in Article: Centre / Supporting

Figure 5 a/b: Twitter citations in election coverage ten weeks prior to 2014 general election in Sweden.

In Sweden, too, there was a clear relationship between journalistic authorship and the role of tweets in articles (fig. 5b). In articles bylined by journalists, tweet citations mainly played a supporting role, exclusively so in *Svenska Dagbladet*. Only the public broadcaster SVT had a substantial number of authored news pieces where tweet citations were at the center of the election coverage. In many of these pieces, Twitter citations seemed to substitute for interviews presenting alternative opinions, an indication of a journalistic use that was more prevalent in

Sweden than in Norway. In the unattributed and wire service articles, tweet citations were at the center of all stories in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, as well as of half of the stories from TT and SVT.

The citation patterns across different groups of actors in Sweden largely matched those observed for Australia: politicians and journalists clearly constituted the most frequently cited groups across all five publications (fig. 6a). A third major group, unnamed users, were especially prominent in the Swedish case, however, and point to the use of Twitter citations as an alternative to conventional vox pops across all outlets. While this group is least prominent in *Dagens Nyheter*, that publication cites the largest number of named ordinary users, indicative perhaps of a different attribution policy for tweets in that news organization. Experts were also prominent, though mainly in the articles of the wire service TT, while celebrity tweets were comparatively absent.
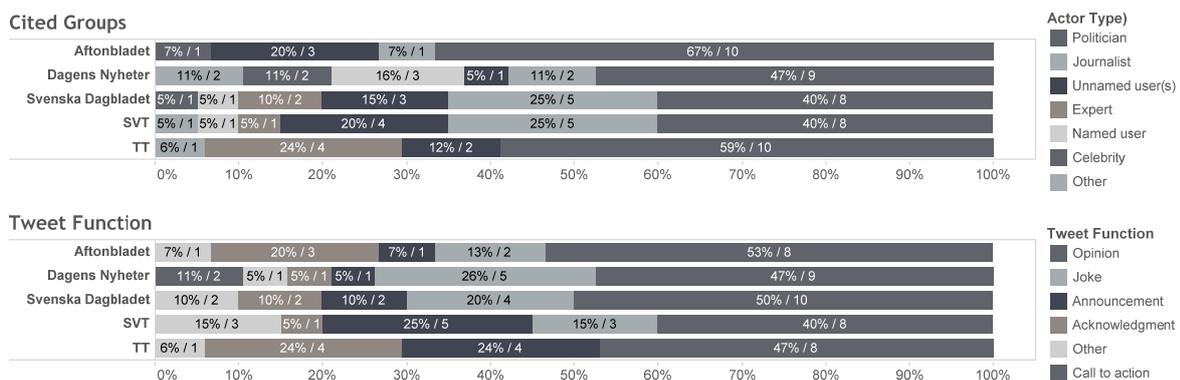

Figure 6a/b: Tweet citations and functions in articles in the 2014 election coverage in Sweden.

Tweet functions in the Swedish data were highly divergent from the Australian picture, however: while opinion tweets were prominent (fig. 6b), there was also a significant presence of joke

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tweets and announcement tweets amongst the tweets cited in news articles (with announcements especially strong in SVT and TT articles). Selfies and other photos were absent from the Swedish data, by contrast – this suggests that the focus on such content during the election campaign may have been a purely Australian phenomenon during the elections studied here.

Comparing the Role of Tweets

In the analysis above, *The Australian* and Norway's *VG* respectively stand out for using a much larger number of tweets in election coverage articles than their competitors (figs. 1a, 3a and 5a). This is largely due to their practice of building a large number of small articles specifically around tweets from well-known people in sport, politics or culture, in 'media diary' or similar sections offering 'color commentary' on the political process or seemingly catching the buzz of the day. Such editorial priorities point to the use of Twitter as a cheap source of material, but we suggest that tweets cited in such articles are unlikely to contribute in any significant way to either agenda-building or agenda-setting processes in the news media. However, these practices demonstrate that content travels from social to news media and that some sources – mainly elites and celebrities – further increase their public visibility plainly by being present on Twitter.

Even if we exclude this inflated number of tweets from our analysis, however, Australian media still stand out as citing tweets in election-related news articles considerably more frequently than their Scandinavian counterparts. The five Australian media outlets cited tweets in some 155 articles during the period examined here, compared to 77 articles in Sweden and only 39 articles in Norway. This necessarily means that there is a considerably greater chance that tweets cited in the news media could influence or set the media agenda in Australia than in Sweden and

especially in Norway – or in other words, that the intermedia agenda-setting power of Twitter sources is lower in Scandinavia than in Australia.

Figures 2a, 4a, and 6a showed which sources gained access to the election news through Twitter citations in the three countries. Australia and Sweden showed largely comparable patterns, with a significant emphasis on citing the tweets of politicians and fellow journalists. Ordinary users constituted a further important group; here, Australian media tended to name the users whose tweets were being cited, while Swedish outlets preferred to leave such users unnamed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Dagens Nyheter*, respectively, both departed from these predominant patterns in their country of origin.

Norwegian media, on the other hand, devoted considerably less space to the tweets of political actors or journalists, and instead presented a broader range of tweeters, with named ordinary users and the relatives of politicians emerging as especially prominent categories. Considering the generally low number of cited tweets in Norwegian news articles, however, specific campaign incidents in the material, as noted above, may have inflated these categories. Further, this may also point to a more marginal role for tweets in news articles: they may merely be added to color the articles, and given such very limited importance, journalists were prepared to give voice to actors that are more marginal by citing their tweets.

Concerning the way that tweets were integrated into journalism (figs. 2b, 4b, and 6b), they were mainly cited as expressions of opinions. This was common to all three countries, but was especially dominant in the Norwegian media. Jokes and announcements were particularly prominent in Sweden, whereas tweets presenting facts were almost exclusively found in

Australian news articles and acknowledgments most strongly in Norwegian publications. Australian media generally used Twitter citations in more diverse ways than the Scandinavian media, with the reproduction of selfies and other photos emerging as a uniquely Australian practice.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research question we have addressed in this chapter is how Twitter contributes to media agenda-building and agenda-setting. Our analysis has so far shown that Twitter is established as a source of political journalism and election campaign coverage in news media in the three countries included in our study. As such, our findings concur with previous studies that content on Twitter travels to the news media and contributes to intermedia agenda-setting and agenda-building. However, both the amount of articles and the way that Twitter citations were integrated into journalistic coverage varied substantially across political settings and media systems. In line with Broersma and Graham (2013) and Wallsten (2015a/b), we find general traits and national specifics. The dominance of elite political sources is a common characteristic across all countries and media. It seems clear from this that sourcing material from Twitter reinforces the power of the political elites to set the agenda of the news media – they are indeed "still leading the dance". The political elites were sourced more often than other groups everywhere, and Twitter content travels to the news media in many different forms: as opinions, comments, announcements, factual statements, and photos.

Still, there are variations that must be explained both by reference to the different political and cultural characteristics of the three countries, as well as by the available resources and journalistic

profiles of each media outlet. First, when comparing Australia and Scandinavia, our findings suggest that the sheer difference in the number of tweets quoted in the news media shows that Twitter contributes more often to agenda-setting and agenda-building in Australia than in Scandinavia. Tweets were included into the election coverage regularly in Australia, while Norwegian and Swedish news media included them less often but were somewhat more open to citing non-elite sources, named and unnamed. The diversity of sources quoted was thus larger in Scandinavia than in Australia. Both population size and electoral system may be drawn on for explaining these differences: the focus on individual politicians may be larger in Australia where voters can influence these individual candidates' chances to be elected, and this may be conducive to including their tweets in news coverage.

The relationship between political journalists and their sources also depends on actual and perceived distance, and this may be smaller in Scandinavia. The differences in citing practices may reflect such differences: Norwegian political journalists report that they regard an interview with a top politician as more credible and valuable than citing social media, and studies of Norwegian political journalism indicate that journalists have few problems in getting access to top politicians and parties, inside and outside government (Allern 2011). The Swedish data however indicated that tweets sometimes substituted for interviews. Studies from both Norway and Sweden show that there is rather little interaction between the top politicians and journalists on Twitter, and that journalistic norms of distance and objectivity prevail among journalists (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013; Rogstad 2013; Skogerbø and Moe forthcoming). In Australia, journalistic access to politicians may be comparatively more difficult to obtain, resulting in a greater reliance on tweets as a substitute.

Twitter is thus clearly a source of intermedia agenda-setting in political news production. Our study nevertheless shows that national differences exist. In Australia, the sourcing of material from Twitter for political news coverage seems to have generated some degree of journalistic innovation, resulting in practices that were not discernible in the election news from Norway and Sweden. The Scandinavian media draw on a larger diversity of sources on Twitter, but there was less integration into journalistic coverage, and accordingly a lower likelihood of substantial intermedia agenda-setting.

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