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**A Twitter Revolution? Uses & Gratifications and Credibility of Twitter**

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**A Twitter Revolution? Uses & Gratifications and Credibility of Twitter**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **A Twitter Revolution? Uses & Gratifications and Credibility of Twitter**

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This study examines how and why individuals use the social networking site Twitter and explores how they perceive the credibility of tweets by politicians. Using a survey to sample adults, it shows that people primarily use the medium to get timely content, for entertainment, and for social interaction, and that interactive tweets by elected officials are viewed as most credible, even if people are not likely to use the medium to directly communicate with politicians themselves. It concludes that Twitter's potential to change how people communicate with each other and with politicians is strong, but that it has not yet been fully realized.

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## Chapter 1: New Media, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Media Credibility

In August 2009, amid a heated debate over health care reform in the United States Congress, an argument that might once have occurred in the backrooms of congressional chambers became public. Two Senators moved their offline, private debate online to the social media website Twitter. Senator Arlen Specter, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, tweeted that Senator Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, was spreading misinformation by contending that President Obama's health care proposal would create so-called "death panels" which would determine whether or not patients were entitled to end-of-life treatment.

Specter tweeted: "Called Senator Grassley to tell him to stop spreading myths about health care reform and imaginary 'death panels.'" He followed it with another tweet: "Had to leave a message — for now. I will talk to him soon."

Grassley quickly replied: "Specter got it all wrong that I ever used words 'death boards.' Even liberal press never accused me of that. So change yur [sic] last Tweet Arlen." Within minutes, bloggers and news organizations caught wind of the debate, publishing the dialogue online (Hensley, 2009; Tapper, 2009).

While short lived, the debate exemplified an important change in the way ideas, opinions, and perceptions of politicians are communicated. In the twenty-first century, the rise of Web 2.0 has fundamentally altered the social, cultural, and political landscape of American society (Lister et al., 2009, p. 165). In it, content is formed,

reformed, and controlled as much by private citizens as by mainstream media, and individuals have access to a wide array of information faster and more easily than ever before. The tools available on the Internet today have expanded interactivity and allow citizens to tune into political discussions and arguments in ways that they never have before.

As the debate between Specter and Grassley illustrates, the growth of social media has largely contributed to the importance of the Internet in creating a new online culture. Jenkins (2008) writes, “Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules...” (p. 3). Accordingly, new kinds of media like social networking sites have changed spoken and unspoken understandings of who produces and who reads or views news. Individuals and even politicians are as much a part of breaking news as trained, seasoned journalists.

Social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook have millions of hits on their websites per month worldwide (Beaumont, 2009; Schonfeld, 2010). Every user has built a “public of semi-public profile” that they can use to “share a connection” with others, “view and traverse their lists of connections and those made by others,” and communicate an array of information to them (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p. 1). As a result, social media have become a “participatory culture” and, arguably, Web 2.0 has sparked a cultural shift. Technological innovations in media have made information gathering and sharing a two-way street where the traditional gate-keepers of information learn as much from consumers as consumers learn from them.

As the media environment changes and social media becomes an increasingly important and interactive piece of it, scholars who study the spread of information, media effects, and the relationship between technology and the news have turned their attention to the online social networks and other relatively new media to examine how they have changed the way individuals learn about world events, politics, and develop opinions about public policy (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; boyd & Ellison, 2007). But they have yet to agree about whether these innovations have fundamentally changed the communicative aspects of the relationship between citizens and elected public officials or altered how individuals gather information.

Many scholars claim that the increasingly innovative ways that people can use the Internet conceivably alters how they learn about events, mobilize others, and talk about issues. The accessibility of the World Wide Web may help reconnect citizens to democracy by allowing groups that have traditionally been omitted from policymaking to more easily engage in political discussions (Tewksbury, 2003). Watkins (2009) contends that social media specifically has become the most important technology in modern day life because individuals can share as much information as they consume. As he writes, “Sharing our lives with others via the Internet and mobile phones means we are constantly connected, accessible, social, and, sometimes, vulnerable” (p. xvii). Everyday citizens can help set the news agenda through social networking sites, redefine the kinds of information that is shared, and be part of the decision-making process.

However, others argue that social media have not redefined the basic components of civic engagement and learning. The interactive components of Web 2.0 have the

potential to change how citizens use and learn from media, but it has not necessarily been realized. Lister et al. (2009) note that the rise of the Internet marks a “remarkable *cultural* achievement” (p. 165). It has changed how we relate interpersonally, but has not altered how we learn or process information about various aspects of society. Despite perceptions of politicians as more accessible as a result of their presence on social media, individuals in the United States are increasingly distrustful and cynical of the political system. Even with the advent of new communication technologies, Americans “behave with increased apathy toward civic and political life” (Ancu & Cozma, 2009, p. 567). While many believe social media can slow or reverse this trend, the current state of public attitude toward the political system is alarming.

Organizations like the Pew Internet & American Life project have explored who uses social media and which social networking sites they prefer (Lenhart et al., 2010; Lenhart & Fox, 2009). Journalists and social commentators have written extensively on the power of the medium to change the dynamics of the political system (Berman, 2009; Johnson, 2009). But for as much as social media has become a hot topic to debate and research, we still do not completely understand how and why people use social media and whether it might actually breathe life back into the increasingly sour and distant relationships between politicians and citizens.

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on how online social media are changing the cultural and political climate by examining several dynamics of citizen use of Twitter. Using uses and gratifications theory as a lens, it seeks to define who uses the social networking site and explore how and why individuals use it. Using

research on media credibility as a secondary lens, it will also explore how individuals perceive various types of content posted on Twitter by politicians, and discuss the implications of findings.

#### NEW MEDIA, NEWS, AND TWITTER

As a new generation of Americans grows up with the Internet, new communication habits are developing online for those who use the Web to gather and spread information. These tools differ from traditional news sources in part because they are more inclusive. Kahn and Kellner (2004) contend that new media forms play an important role in today's political climate because they can highlight issues ignored by mainstream news sources, express non-traditional views, often present information in inventive ways, and involve people differently than in the past.

A plethora of new media innovations have emerged. For example, the Cable News Network customarily broadcasts videos uploaded to its website by "iReporters"—individuals who provide their opinions and help make news. The network's website claims that iReporters, "help shape how and what CNN covers everyday" (iReport.com, 2010). By promoting first-hand accounts of events and allowing citizens to share their personal opinions this way, the age of new media has fomented a culture in which citizens have become informal journalists themselves. Spurred by what many perceived as mainstream media's lack of adequate information about the attacks to the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001 and the retaliation by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, weblogs emerged as alternate sources of information (Choi et al., 2006). Many blogs devoted to singular issues are outside the constraints of traditional

media and often detail particular points of view, aggregate relevant information from other sources, or provide opportunities for more complex and detailed knowledge. On the social networking site Facebook, individuals can respond directly to public officials who also have accounts and share news and information with friends, colleagues, or strangers. Texas State Representative Dan Patrick (R-Houston), for example, routinely uses Facebook to interact with constituents. Like many legislators, he posts links to articles that portray him favorably or express an opinion that he supports. News feeds concerning his thoughts about political events are a constant feature, both during and after campaign season. Dozens of other elected public officials around the country have begun using Facebook and other sites to share current information about what they are doing or thinking on a real-time basis.

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, which has most thoroughly investigated use trends for social networking sites, over 35% of adults have at least one account on a site like Twitter or Facebook (Lenhart, 2009). Once regarded as a fad among youth, four times as many adults currently use a social networking site as did in 2005 (Lenhart, 2009). Some scholars claim that such sites are overwhelmingly used by individuals who simply want to talk to friends and have little value as a place for gathering information or as a tool for engagement (Boyd, 2008). Researchers cannot deny that many individuals use the sites for purely social reasons. After all, the sites are named “social networks” for a reason. However, an increasing number of users visit these sites with motives other than simply hearing the inner thoughts of acquaintances. Nearly 20% of users have posted social or political information on the Web or have used a site for

political activity, including learning about particular candidates, political events, or public policy issues (Fox et al., 2009). While this is by no means a majority of users, the use of such sites is expanding. Marketers who recognize the popularity of social media have moved advertisements to social networking sites and private companies now make millions advising less Web-saavy interest groups on how to use online social networks to their advantage (Kirkpatrick, 2008).

The social media website Twitter was first launched in 2006, and allows users to post updates of 140-characters or less. It has become one of the fastest growing and most popular sites of its kind. Unlike some rival sites, Twitter is relatively open—users can “follow” or track updates from almost anyone without their direct approval. Unlike many sites, which require users to have full profiles, Twitter is relatively easy to initiate and the skill required to use it is low. *The New York Times*' David Pogue explains the site this way: “you sign up to receive the utterances of other people. Eventually, your screen fills up with a scrolling display of their quips—jokes, recommended links, thoughts for the day, and a lot of ‘what I’m doing right now’ stuff” (2009). As the site has evolved and has become increasingly popular—visits to Twitter.com have grown 1,382% between February 2008 and February 2009—unique features have been developed (Ostrow, 2009). A search function has been added, as well as hashtags, which allow users at a particular event or those tweeting about a distinct issue, for example, to group their updates and follow trending topics in their area.

Early research shows that those who use Twitter have several unique characteristics that make them different from the users of other social networking sites

like Facebook. They are *exceptionally* mobile—80% of those who “tweet” or post a status update do so from a mobile device like a Blackberry or iPhone, enabling them to post updates from anywhere at any time and check up on who they follow frequently. The average user is in his or her mid-30s, several years older than the average user or other social networking sites, negating the common assumption that Twitter is used mostly by adolescents and teenagers (Cheng, 2009). And, users are *growing* in numbers, as marketing analysts contend. The site will have 18.1 million users in 2010 (eMarketer, 2009).

Different types of users and organizations have begun to use the site in various innovative ways. Celebrities and sports figures have flocked to the site. Basketball star Shaquille O’Neal sometimes tweets his location, offering free tickets to the user following him who gets to the location first. Actor Ashton Kutcher challenged CNN to a contest to see which could get to 1 million followers first (the actor won). Southwest Airlines tweeted a special promotional code to give a discount to followers after the company amassed 1 million followers of its own, and the retail site Amazon.com tweets daily deals on music downloads.

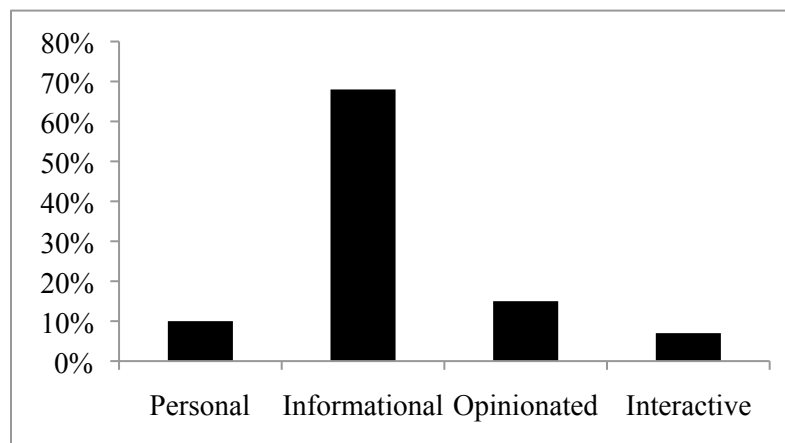
Increasingly, Twitter is used in relation to public affairs, news, and politics as well. The District Attorney’s office for a county in Texas recently decided to publish on Twitter the names of drivers who were arrested for driving while intoxicated, hoping that online public shaming would deter other potential drunk drivers (Lee, 2010). During the aftermath of the shootings at a military base in Killeen, Texas, *The New York Times* compiled a list of all Central Texas news sources with Twitter accounts who were



reporting from the area, so that people who follow the national paper could get a running feed of the latest and most accurate information from reporters who knew the area best (Ostrow, 2009). When a commercial jet crashed landed in the Hudson River in January, 2009, a Florida native visiting New York City tweeted, “There’s a plane in the Hudson,” and posted a link to a photo he took of the sight before television camera crews could arrive on the scene and journalists could determine the facts (Ovide, 2009).

Many politicians in the United States have congregated to the site and have used it to provide different types of content to followers. One study of tweets by elected public officials classified their content into four different categories (Kraft, 2009). Informational tweets by politicians function to provide knowledge to constituents or other interested parties with speed and efficiency. Personal tweets do not include political or policy-related information but provide a peek into the daily life of a public official. Other tweets are opinionated, revealing the political leanings of a public official about particular issues, or in some cases, individual politicians. Many of these tweets convey a political sentiment that consumers of news from traditional sources may not obtain from the generalizing overview that mainstream media often provides. According to the study, ostensibly fewer posts are interactive and involve direct or indirect communication with another Twitter user, be they constituent, journalist, or politician. Figure 1 shows how tweets by sixty-one politicians sampled from the U.S. Congress and the Texas Legislature were categorized in the study.

Figure 1: Categorized Tweets By Politicians



Additionally, the ability of social networking sites like Twitter to help circumvent censorship and mobilize movements worldwide is measurable. After the 2009 presidential election in Iran, a country known for censoring its citizens, thousands took to the streets to protest the suspect vote tallies. Although paramilitary troops tried to stymie mass protests with violence, Iranians used Twitter to publicize the location of protests to rally supporters, warn others to stay away from corners where police were violently cracking down on those expressing their opinions, and share first-hand accounts of the scene with the outside world after almost all foreign journalists were ousted from the country (Grossman, 2009). In the days and weeks after a devastating earthquake in Haiti, some pushed photos of the destruction through Twitter. As a consequence of its multifaceted uses, many have turned to Twitter as a primary source for information. As journalist David Carr writes, “By carefully curating the people you follow, Twitter becomes an always-on data stream from really bright people in their respective fields, whose tweets are often full of links to incredibly vital, timely information” (2009).

Despite the countless situations in which Twitter has helped redefine how information is communicated and who pushes it, scholars are only just beginning to study it. Much of the research concerning social media has focused on use by youth for identity development and as a vehicle for social capital (Boyd, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Some suggest that these sites do little to politically engage the citizenry. Boyd (2008) argues that those who view social networking sites as able to change the ways that people engage are misled. The presumption that “technology’s structure determines practice” and that how social networking sites are organized can excite users to learn more about politics is woefully misleading (p. 241). Society in general often rushes to embrace the latest technological innovation as revolutionary before stopping to study and question the true merits of the fervor. Many have critiqued social networking sites by noting that they over-simplify complex issues that few people understand anyway. As *New York Times Magazine*’s Matt Bai writes:

...whatever else Americans may be craving in our politics these days, brevity and immediacy aren’t among them. Politics today is already too simplistic and binary, its news cycle more comically truncated and ephemeral than at any time in our history (2009).

Following this logic, social networking sites do nothing to boost the quality of the knowledge that people can obtain online and instead truncate information to a shell of its original form.

Like-minded scholars and journalists agree with Bai’s sentiment and largely contend that the last thing that the political landscape needs is to fragment policy issue discussions by posting short blurbs of information on social networking sites. Watkins

(2009) argues that social media have enormous influence and potential, but notes that significant divides along lines of race and class still exist when it comes to these tools (p. 175). danah boyd, who has written extensively on the subject, contends that social media use includes a classist element; the same social bracketing that happens outside of digital technology is replicated on social networking sites (2007). Social media may provide access to new kinds of information for some, but a social media digital divide may lurk behind the fervor of it.

Still, others suggest that such sites can enhance our understanding of political networks and potentially engage otherwise apathetic citizens in political processes (Wellman et al., 2001). As the popularity of these sites quickly multiplies, traditional media such as print newspapers and nightly television networks have also paid close attention to the evolution and uses of the site. Many individuals have begun to use Twitter and other similar sites to bypass mainstream sources for news and information and actively seek it out through other venues. The decline in perceived credibility of traditional news has not helped. Less than 35% of the American public finds the top television news programs credible (Pew Research Center, 2004). *Time's* Steve Johnson (2009) calls the ability to share information on Twitter revolutionary—it's easy and accessible to the masses and opens the conversation to populations that might otherwise be left out of political decision-making.

Despite their popularity, little quantitative research has specifically addressed how and why individuals use these tools (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). There is even less on the circumstances in which individuals use such sites

for information gathering, whether the speed with which users can access information has changed the motives they have for using the sites, and how politically interested users perceive posts by politicians. That scholars have not yet fully explored this field may be explained in part by the difficulty of studying a medium that is quick to evolve and change—an trend discussed by media scholars in 2000 may be completely outdated by the time it is read in 2010, or even in 2002. Yet as technological innovations occur with greater frequency and as news consumption habits change, those who seek to understand the way we learn and share information will benefit from efforts to understand how social media is changing the ways that public and private individuals interact with and influence the world around them.

#### USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

Uses and gratifications theory has received attention from scholars for decades and plays a role in seeking to understand the popularity of social networking sites like Twitter. It focuses on how and why individuals consume media to satisfy various desires and necessities. According to Rubin (2009), a leading scholar of uses and gratifications, the theory seeks to “explain how people use media to gratify their needs, understand motives for media behavior, and identify functions or consequences that follow from needs, motives, and behavior” (p. 165). Explained differently, uses and gratifications theory helps identify and explain why people choose to read, view, or listen to various media.

In the 1940s, when the theory took root, uses and gratifications was considered “cutting-edge” because it enabled scholars to categorize the functions of individual media

use. Ruggiero (2000) notes that the early phases of uses and gratifications research was more descriptive than theoretically driven but was nonetheless a unique attempt to investigate the reasons behind communication media choice. The gap between this description and understanding underlying motive was explored in subsequent decades when scholars examined and, “operationalized many social and psychological variables that were presumed to be precursors of different patterns of consumption of gratifications” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 6).

The theory presupposes that individuals specifically seek various media outlets for certain information and “have enough self-awareness to know and articulate their reasons for using the media” (Urista, Dong, & Day, pp. 54-55). Many scholars have found that individuals generally use media for several reasons, including for information, entertainment, and social interaction across media types such as television and radio (Katz & Blumler, 1974; Perse, 1992).

Nuances to the theory also apply. Rubin (1984) found that the extent to which individuals use various types of media changes. He discussed differences between *ritualistic* viewing, in which individuals use media out of habit and experience less goal-oriented use, and *instrumental* viewing, in which people use various media outlets for specific purposes. Kayahara and Wellman (2007) divided gratifications into process and content categories, contending that process gratifications online fulfill needs that a user wants from actually using the medium, while content gratifications fill desires from the material, and suggest that the Internet allows for an additional level of social gratifications not necessarily met by other forms of media.

According to Lin (1996), uses and gratifications is an important theoretical tool because it lets scholars study media, “via a single or multiple sets of psychological needs, psychological motives, communication channels, communication content, and psychological gratifications within a particular or cross-cultural context” (para. 1). Critics of uses and gratifications contend that a crucial premise of the theory, that users play an active role in choosing their medium, is overly assumptive. According to this logic, individual media choice is influenced by outside factors, such as political affiliation or what their friends or families use or do not use, and what an individual chooses to read or view is not decided in a bubble.

While scholars must be mindful of such additional influences that may affect media choice, the Internet has vastly increased users’ level of control. No longer must television news viewers simply choose between two or three network news channels. Indeed, it may now be easier for individuals to find what they want. As Prior (2005) argues, “greater media choice makes it easier for people to find their preferred content” (p. 577). Web users now have access to endless kinds of content online and make infinitely more complex choices about when and where to find information. Similarly, some have suggested that new technological tools used by individuals to communicate necessitate that researchers challenge and hone previous theories (Morris and Ogan, 1996, para. 8). As a result, the gratifications that researchers typologized when studying the television have been expanded to account for the unique functions of the Internet.

Several scholars contend that how and why people use the Internet provides additional questions for uses and gratifications research. Research on the subject has been

applied to various forms of content on the Web, and much of it suggests that the functions of the Internet largely satisfy many of the same needs met by television, including information-gathering and entertainment. Papacharissi & Rubin (2000) identified five motives for using the Internet: information-seeking, interpersonal utility, entertainment, passing time, and convenience. According to them, the Internet is not only an outlet for traditional uses such as information seeking and entertainment but functions as a medium for completing tasks and social interaction (p. 179). As they note, because millions of individuals are using new technologies in the twenty-first century, “we require greater understanding of the personal and social attributes that affect why people use computer-mediated communication” (p. 175).

Others have investigated gratifications individuals receive from using the Internet. Stafford and Gonier (2004) found that using a search engine and finding information are among the most salient factors of Web use, as are using the medium to communicate with others in place of offline communication and for socialization. Specifically examining motives for seeking political information, Kaye and Johnson (2002) used a survey to find what desires people have for going online to learn about candidates or politics. They found that individuals’ seek political information on the Internet for reasons related to guidance, information seeking or surveillance, entertainment, and social utility.

Largely, researchers are just beginning to explore individual uses of social media (Tremayne, 2007). Hanson and Haridakis (2008) have examined motives for viewing comedy news on the video website YouTube, noting that the ability for individuals to share content, or even upload their own, is what makes the form unique. They found that



demographic characteristics can influence what individuals choose to view and what to share with others, and that individuals largely watch YouTube to learn information and to be entertained, reasons identified by other uses and gratifications researchers.

Those who have begun to explore desires specifically satisfied by social media—there are few—note that using social networking sites satisfied several unique needs. Urista, Dong, and Day (2009) investigated why young people use social media, drawing on MySpace and Facebook as case studies. They found that most people indicated communication efficiency and convenience as primary motives for using the sites, as well as indicating that they use it to satisfy questions about others, for popularity, and to maintain relationship with others. They also suggest an important addition to uses and gratifications theory as a result of social media, contending that, “individuals can be instantly gratified by their use of SNS through both mediated social content and through selective and on-demand access to the media content provided as part of SNS services” (p. 217).

In one of the only other published studies exploring the intersection between uses and gratifications and social media, Ancu and Cozma (2009) examined the motives for and desires met when individuals accessed the MySpace profiles of political candidates and found that users do not necessarily log on to those profiles to find out information about candidates, but for social interaction. In other words, motivations for accessing politician profiles on social media had less to do with the candidate and more to do with meeting like-minded individuals. Additionally, social networking sites may satisfy previously identified gratifications sought in different ways, such as by allowing

individuals to interact with others and become the creators or informers of news, rather than simply consumers (Urista, Dong & Day, 2009, p. 217). Ruggiero notes, “As new technologies present people with more and more media choices, motivation and satisfaction become even more crucial components of audience analysis” (2000, p. 14).

Social cognitive theorists have suggested that, “Internet research has introduced new conceptual and operational approaches and new variables that now challenge some of the basic assumptions, procedures, and findings of uses and gratifications” (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p. 358). Consequently, social media and the next innovations on the Web may continue to alter how and why people go online or use new media to engage, learn, and be entertained, remaining an important area for research.

#### THE INTERNET AND MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Media credibility has long been a topic of discussion in political communication. Most scholars cite Hovland and Weiss’ 1951 study as the first thorough publication on the subject. Administering questionnaires that evaluated how credible individuals found various sources of information, they discovered that assessments of credibility changed when information was attributed to different sources. Study participants might consider a story trustworthy when they thought it came from a prestigious source but responded differently when they thought the same information came from somewhere less reputable. Johnson and Kaye (1998) define credibility as the degree to which individuals view media sources as believable, fair, accurate, and in-depth, and many have defined credibility in a similar way. Researchers began to more fully examine how believable and reliable sources of information were in the 1980s, when the public attitudes toward the

media—specifically print journalism—became more cynical (Mulder, 1980; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Rimmer & Weaver, 1989; Kim & Johnson, 2009).

The format of the Internet, and how organizations and individuals alike have used it to convey news and information, raises new questions about whether past declarations about the nature of the media’s trustworthiness, believability, and accuracy hold true in the realm of online information. New, unique features of the Web may make individuals perceive media differently than the studies from decades past shows. The twenty-four hour news cycle and quest for high ratings conceivably makes news organizations more likely to report rumor and sidestep fact checking in an effort to beat other sources to the punch (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). Online media, including social networking sites, may be more likely to link to other sites with erroneous information, both knowingly and unknowingly (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). While most individuals are not likely to verify information they perceive as questionable, the lack of “central control” over the Web allows for the circulation of flawed information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000, p. 516).

Kim and Johnson (2009) have addressed the nature of news on the Internet. As they write, “In essence, the free and unregulated flow of information on the web could make it difficult to obtain credible information and even lead to false information” (p. 285). Metzger (2005) explains that, “the concern about credibility stems from the fact that Internet and digitization technologies lowered the cost of information dissemination while increasing accessibility to that information” (p. 2). In other words, the features of the Web that have largely made information more accessible are the same ones that may make it less credible in the eyes of news consumers. Indeed, in late 2009, the Pew

Research Center for People & the Press found that 63% of individuals believed news sources in general were not completely accurate, the lowest level since 1985 (CBS News, 2009).

Many scholars have noted trends both in how individuals gather news in an increasingly technology-savvy world and in how they view the media as less credible. Most have made use of surveys to compare the credibility of one type of media to another. Johnson and Kaye (1998) compared Web use to more traditional media use among politically interested individuals to investigate the degree to which people who use various online sources for news found those sources credible. Their work suggested that media use is a predictor of credibility. Accordingly, individuals generally trust information from Internet sources that they most frequently visit. However, the relationship between media use and credibility may be different among Youth. Scholars have found that young people do not necessarily trust the media that they seek most often (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; Jarvis, Stroud & Gilliland, 2009).

Continuing their theme of studying those who are politically interested, Johnson and Kaye (2000) explored how those individuals who relied on online sources of information viewed the credibility of various online sources such as online television news, newsmagazines, information distributed by political candidates, and information on specific issues. They also explored how perceived credibility for these distinct sources compared to that of individuals who customarily get their information from traditional news sources. Their results bolstered findings from their 1998 study but revealed additional discoveries about the nature of perceived credibility of online sources for

politically interested individuals. The more one follows an election, the more likely that person is to judge online newspapers as credible. Furthermore, traditional newspaper readership is strongly correlated to credibility of online newspapers. Choi et al. (2006) explain this phenomenon well—a person who receives *The New York Times* on her doorstep every morning and views the newspaper as credible will likely also view nytimes.com as credible (p. 212).

Other studies support conclusions regarding predictors of credibility (Choi et al., 2006; Kim & Johnson, 2009). Kioussis (2001) compared online news to print and television news. He found that newspapers are perceived as most credible, followed by online news and print news respectively, and that perceptions of credibility between media types are positively correlated, but that individuals are slightly skeptical about all three media types identified (p. 396). Additionally, the finding that online media use predicts assessments of credibility are bolstered by research addressing selective exposure. For example, Melican and Dixon (2008) write, “as a person selectively exposes himself or herself to sources and information, the choices will affect the perceived credibility of that source” (p. 155).

Some researchers have moved past simply comparing the credibility of traditional news use to online use of the same sources, reflecting the development of new tools for information sharing on the Web. Johnson and Kaye (2003) sought to specifically understand the Web use motivations of politically interested users by differentiating between types of Internet use—namely information gathering, posting to bulletin boards, and chat forums. They discovered that those who pay attention to news regularly use the

Internet to help them make political decisions. Other studies have specifically explored the credibility of blogs, noting that these sites for news and opinion often operate outside the purview of traditional journalistic principles that facilitate reporting on nytimes.com, washingtonpost.com, and similarly formatted sources, but attract significant readership (Johnson and Kaye, 2004). Mitchell and Steele (2005) compare the credibility of mainstream journalism and blogs. They explain the distinction:

Traditionally in journalism, credibility means a story rings true. It is accurate. It is in context. The reporting and presentation are fair. In the blogosphere, credibility may borrow from those values but is likely also shaped by what the individual blogger or group of bloggers -- stands for. (p. 65).

Johnson and Kaye (2004) also explore how credible blog users view blogs and whether bloggers have any bias toward finding these sources more credible than other online sources. They determine that a large majority of blog users find blogs most credible and view “depth of information” as an important component of their use. The majority of individuals in the Johnson and Kaye (2004) survey viewed online newspapers as more credible than blogs, but many people turn to blogs because they were cynical toward mainstream media and view the opinionated information not influenced by corporate interests as a more genuine form of journalism (p. 626).

Still others have examined the nuances of source credibility on the Internet. Flanagin and Metzger (2007) sought to provide an overview of perceived credibility in relation to various different kinds of websites. They contend that three different kinds of credibility identified by another scholar (Sundar, 1999)—the credibility of the message, the site, and the sponsor—will vary based on whether the sites are news related, special

interest sites, business-related, or personal sites. Accordingly, sites run by news organizations will be perceived as most credible, followed by special interest, business, and personal sites. By separating out the types of sites and showing that media credibility is not necessarily binary, their study provides a more intricate look at media credibility than the numerous and sometimes seemingly repetitive studies by other scholars overlooked. The degree to which people find online sources credible fluctuates and perceptions of what constitutes credibility itself may vary depending on the type of site.

While the type of site viewed may contribute to perceptions of credibility, demographic characteristics may also influence credibility. Many past studies investigating perceptions of credibility have uncovered distinctions according to particular demographic characteristics including gender, education, and income level. For example, males tend to regard media as less credible, as do individuals who have high education levels and income (Mulder, 1981; Robinson & Kohut, 1988). Additionally, young people and Democrats tend to view media as more credible (Bucy, 2003; Westley & Severin, 1964).

Credibility studies have clearly focused on well-established forms of gathering news and information. However, scholars have yet to evaluate credibility in the context of social networking sites, including how individuals view the credibility of content posted by politicians. While users get content on various forms of social media in different ways, how people view the content pushed by elected officials on social networking may alter notions of perceived media and political credibility. Perhaps those who get information

from social media will be most likely to view information posted on the sites by others as credible, even if they are politicians.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research on social media use draws from a host of well-developed theories and topic areas in political communication and other fields that address media and new technology. Yet because it is a relatively new innovation and individuals are seemingly discovering new ways to use it every day, the use of social media for information gathering has not yet been fully explored. For all the speculation in political and social circles on the revolutionary ability of Twitter and other sites like it, scholars still do not know who uses it, what they use it for, and how users perceive the credibility of content posted to such sites by politicians, in spite of their increasing presences on the sites.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How and why do people use Twitter?

RQ2: Do Twitter users vary by age, gender, and political affiliation?

RQ3: How do individuals view the credibility of tweets by politicians?

RQ4: Do perceptions of credibility vary by age, gender, and political affiliation?



## Chapter 2: Surveying Twitter Users

This study examines how and why individuals use Twitter and investigates perceptions of the credibility of postings to the site by politicians. Because Twitter is an online social networking tool, an Internet-based survey was used to assess these questions. As a first step to this discussion, users who identified as somewhat politically informed or interested in politics were sought.

### METHODOLOGY

*Data Collection.* A fifty-item survey was posted to several sections of Craigslist, an online community Web site with a diverse array of discussion boards devoted to sharing information about local events and jobs, and which provides forums for conversation on a wide variety of topics.<sup>1</sup> All major cities around the country have Craigslist pages devoted to their communities. A description and link to the survey was sent to the community politics section, the politics discussion forum, or alternately the jobs et cetera section of the site in forty cities around the United States.<sup>2</sup> Posting on Craigslist was done to attract a broad range of individuals who are politically interested, and because posting to the site is free.

A link to the survey was made available during a four-and-a-half week period between February 5, 2010 and March 8, 2010. Two hundred twenty-six individuals started the survey and one hundred ninety-one finished it, providing an 84.5% completion

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the online survey is included in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete list of dates and cities where the survey was posted, please see Appendix B.

rate. Survey participants were given the opportunity to enter in a random drawing for a gift certificate to the online retailer Amazon.com worth a nominal sum.

*Measures.* The survey sought to assess how respondents viewed the credibility of various online sources of information. To determine this, participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with eleven statements about news and information they receive from four types of online sources: online newspapers, news or political blogs, social networking sites, and for those who use it, Twitter. The eleven statements asked whether respondents viewed each source as “fair,” “biased,” “accurate,” “factual,” and whether they “tell the whole story,” “invade people’s privacy,” “watch after readers’ interests,” “separate fact and opinion,” “can be trusted,” “are concerned about the public interest,” and “have well-trained reporters.” The 7-point scale ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Although many other research studies assessing credibility create an index by gauging assessments on only four questions, “believability,” “fairness,” “accuracy,” and “depth of information,” the eleven question index used to in this survey was based on past indexes assessing credibility (Rubin, 2009).

Uses and gratifications sought from Twitter were measured using an eighteen-item index and answered affirmatively to a question asking all participants if they maintained an account on Twitter. The index contained three questions each in six different categories: general information seeking, decisional utility, entertainment, interpersonal utility, parasocial interaction, and temporal utility. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which these various reasons for using a medium applied to them

on a 5-point scale ranging from “does not apply at all” to “definitely applies.” This index was also derived from past studies (Gilliland & Jarvis, 2006; Rubin, 2009). The index for temporal utility was not derived from previous research but was created to account for the desire for timely information that some individuals may have as a result of the speed with which the Internet provides current information.

In addition to questions assessing the credibility of online news sources and uses and gratifications of Twitter, respondents answered an additional set of questions. Twitter users were asked to indicate whether or not they follow nine different categories of users: friends, family, actors/actresses, sports figures, politicians or other public officials, news sources, journalists, political pundits, or businesses. User respondents were then asked to indicate how often they participate in ten different kinds of activities on the site on a 4-point scale ranging from “regularly” to “never.” These activities spanned from posting information about location or mood, to those containing newsworthy information or those consisting of a re-tweet, in which a user simply posts what someone else already has.

A subsequent set of questions asked all users to assess the credibility of posts by politicians. They were asked to respond to five different tweets: a tweet containing personal information about how a Senator spent her evening, a tweet containing non-partisan but politics-related information about a politician’s events for the day, a left-leaning opinionated tweet that expresses an anti-Bush and pro-Obama sentiment, a right-leaning opinionated tweet critiquing President Obama’s budget, and a tweet that asked followers of the particular politician to respond to a question. On a 7-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” respondents were asked to indicate the

degree to which they felt each tweet was “reliable,” “informed,” “qualified,” “intelligent,” “valuable,” “expert,” “honest,” “friendly,” “pleasant,” or “selfish.” Below the scale, respondents were given the opportunity to comment on each tweet and were also asked to comment on what they believe is the most useful part of Twitter and on the motives that they think politicians have to use it.

Additional variables were also assessed to examine political attitudes and sophistication. To assess these attitudes, respondents were asked to indicate their political party affiliation and how much they generally enjoy keeping up with the news. To examine sophistication, respondents were asked to answer three current events questions that had been prominently featured in the news shortly before the survey was written. Questions compiling demographic information were also asked.

*Sample Characteristics.* The average participant was 34.7 years old ( $SD = 11.8$ , range 19-78) and most participants sampled were aged 25-34 (32.6%) and 18-24 (26.7%). The vast majority of respondents who identified their race were White (72.6%). The breakdown for other races was 12.3% Multi-racial, 7.8% Asian or Pacific Islander, 6.1% Black or African American, and 1.1% Native American. Over half of participants were female (59.3%) compared to male (40.7%). Almost all participants had at least some college experience (94.2%). More specifically, 44.7% had a four-year college degree, 22.6% had some college only, 15.3% had a master’s degree, 6.8% had a two-year college or Associate’s degree, 4.7% had a doctorate or professional degree, 4.2% had a high school diploma or the equivalent, and 1.6% did not complete high school. Approximately 47.2% of respondents indicated their political party affiliation as Independent, while

33.1% identified as Democrats, 10.7% as Republicans, and 9% supported other political parties. A political sophistication scale composed of three questions was created to measure political knowledge with a range of zero (low) to three (high) and participants had a mean of 1.76.

The number of Twitter users and non-Twitter users who participated in this study was fairly even; 50.5% of respondents said they had an account on Twitter.com. The profile of the typical Twitter user who participated was similar to the sample characteristics in general. Of Twitter-using participants, 46% were Independents compared to 11.2% Republicans, 34.8% Democrats, and 7.9% supported other parties. 49.5% had a four-year college degree. With regards to age, most Twitter users sampled were aged 25-34 (34.1%) and 18-24 (31.8%). Most notably, 69.5% of Twitter users were female compared to 30.5% male, and the mean for the political sophistication scale was slight lower than for all users (1.72).

## FINDINGS

The first research questions asked how and why people use Twitter. According to those surveyed, individuals follow a wide variety of types of sources, ranging from individuals to news organizations or businesses. The vast majority follows friends (85.6%), news sources (73.8%), and businesses (65.7%). Additionally, over half follow family (55.8%), politicians (55.3%), actors (52%), and journalists (51%). Sixty-nine percent of users also follow some sort of other content provider. The range of different sources reveals that users who consider themselves politically interested and informed use the Website to keep tabs on a variety of sources.

Users also tweet a wide array of information themselves. Those who use the site were asked to indicate how often they tweet nine different kinds of information, and Table 1 indicates how they responded. Over half of respondents indicated that they either sometimes (35.6%) or regularly (20.2%) post information about what they are doing or thinking. Of all the various kinds of tweets, participants responded “never” in this category the least (18.3%). In other words, 87.7% of respondents have tweeted information about themselves at least once. The majority of participants seem to primarily use Twitter to post or repost news or information or provide links to newsworthy content, including photos or audio material. 61.5% sometimes or regularly post links, while 55.7% repost links provided by another user whose information they think is worth spreading, indicating that the majority of users who consider themselves politically informed share content in addition to providing their own. Many individuals with accounts on the Website use Twitter to interact with others whom they know. Most (67%) either sometimes or regularly use the Website to reply to friends, creating an online conversation of sorts. Although the information described above indicates that over half of participants follow politicians, almost three-quarters (74.7%) indicate that they never or hardly ever reply to something posted by a politician.

Table 1: Types and Frequency of Posts on Twitter (in Percentages)

How often do you...	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Regularly
Post what you are doing or thinking	18.3	26.0	35.6	20.2
Post news or information	23.1	26.9	32.7	17.3
Post links to photos, audio or other multimedia	27.9	17.3	36.5	18.3
Post links to news or information	21.2	17.3	41.3	20.2
Repost news or information	26.9	17.3	36.5	19.2
Repost links to photos, audio or other multimedia	32.0	16.5	36.9	14.6
Repost links to news or information	26.0	17.3	40.4	16.3
Reply to a friend	21.4	11.7	38.8	28.2
Reply to a politician	48.5	26.2	18.4	06.8

*Uses and Gratifications.* To determine why people use Twitter, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which statements in six categories addressing commonly identified motives for using media applied to them. Those categories were: information seeking, decisional utility, entertainment, interpersonal utility, temporal utility, and parasocial interaction. Table 2 indicates how participants responded. Respondents indicated using Twitter for information seeking to a low degree. Less than a third of individuals said they use Twitter to keep up with current events (29.8%), while just over a third (36.3%) indicated that they use it because they can trust the information they get from it. The findings in the decisional utility category are mixed. Thirty-six percent said they use it to understand the job our government is doing, while a nearly identical number

(36.5%) said they use it to make up their mind about important issues of the day. However, 47.1% said that they use Twitter to find out what other people think are important issues of the day. More participants indicated that they use the service for its entertainment value. Over half (57.2%) use it because they find it entertaining. A nearly equal percent of individuals believe Twitter is exciting (35.9%) as it is unexciting (39.8%).

Largely, respondents indicated logging on to Twitter for its interpersonal and temporal qualities. Although few people use it to support their views to others, more people than not use it to pass information onto others and to give them things to talk about (36.9%). In the temporal utility category, 44.7% indicated using it to know what events happen as soon as they occur, while 40.4% use it because it is an efficient way to find information. Lastly, for parasocial interaction, 40.8% use it to compare their ideas to the ideas of others, but few (46.2%) seem to use it because it gives a human quality to news and information.



Table 2: Uses and Gratifications of Twitter (in Percentages)

Do you use Twitter to...	Applies	Does Not Apply	Neutral
<i>Information Seeking</i>			
Keep up with current issues	29.8	51.0	19.2
So I won't be surprised by higher prices & things	13.4	70.2	16.3
Because I can trust the information I get	17.7	63.7	18.6
<i>Decisional Utility</i>			
To understand the job our government is doing	22.1	63.5	14.4
To make up my mind about important issues of the day	23.1	61.5	15.4
To find out what other people think are important issues	47.1	38.5	14.4
<i>Entertainment</i>			
Because it's entertaining	57.2	24.3	18.4
Because it's dramatic	37.9	42.7	19.4
Because it's exciting	39.8	35.9	24.3
<i>Interpersonal Utility</i>			
To support my views to others	38.4	43.3	18.3
To pass on information to others	40.3	37.5	22.1
To give me things to talk about	36.9	33.0	30.1
<i>Temporal Utility</i>			
To know what happens when it happens	44.7	35.0	20.4
To know what happens before others do	34.9	49.5	15.5
Because it's efficient	40.4	39.4	20.2
<i>Parasocial Interaction</i>			
Because it gives a human quality to information	31.8	46.2	22.1
To compare my ideas to others	40.8	41.7	17.5
To know what others think are important issues	37.2	41.2	21.6

*Differences Between Users.* The second research question asked whether use patterns vary by age, gender, or political affiliation. Table 3 shows the percent of individuals in these groups who either sometimes or regularly tweeted various types of content. Republicans were most likely to frequently reply to a politicians and Democrats were least likely to do so. Males were also more likely than females to reply to a politician. Out of all groups, younger adults were most likely to post content about what they are doing or thinking, post news or information, or post links to news or information.

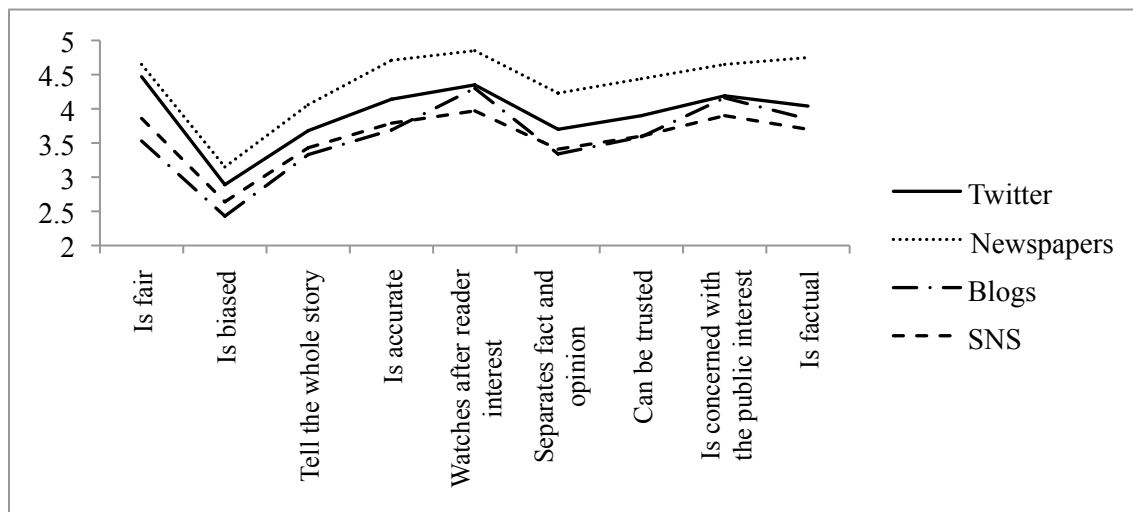
Table 3: Frequency and Types of Tweets by User (in Percentages)

How often do you post...	Males	Females	Adults ≤ 34	Adults > 34	Repub.	Ind.	Dem.	All
What you are doing doing or thinking	43.4	57.6	59.3	45.2	50.0	53.7	56.3	55.8
News or information	53.3	48.5	57.6	38.8	50.0	48.7	46.9	50.0
Links to photos, audio or other multimedia	60.0	51.5	57.6	48.4	50.0	53.7	50.0	54.8
Links to news or information	60.0	60.6	62.7	54.9	60.0	63.4	59.4	61.5
Repost news or information	60.0	51.5	57.6	45.2	60.0	53.7	53.2	55.7
Repost links to photos, audio or other multimedia	53.3	47.7	65.9	36.7	50.0	50.0	40.6	51.5
Repost links to news or information	53.4	56.1	56.0	51.6	60.0	53.6	15.6	56.7
Reply to a friend	70.0	63.1	70.7	51.7	80.0	63.4	54.9	67.0
Reply to a politician	33.3	18.5	24.1	19.3	40.0	24.4	15.6	25.2

Independent t-tests also show a significant difference between the mean value for females (M=.59) and males (M=.79) when they were asked to indicate the degree to which they follow news sources on Twitter at the .001 level.

*Perceived Credibility of News and Information Sources.* A third research question asked how individuals perceive the credibility of news and information they get from Twitter compared to other types of online news and information sources. Credibility was assessed using a nine-item scale, which had a Cronbach’s alpha of .91.<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 shows how Twitter users compared their responses. Users consistently ranked online newspapers as most credible in each category, and Twitter ranked second highest. Users perceived Twitter as more credible than both blogs and social networking sites generally.

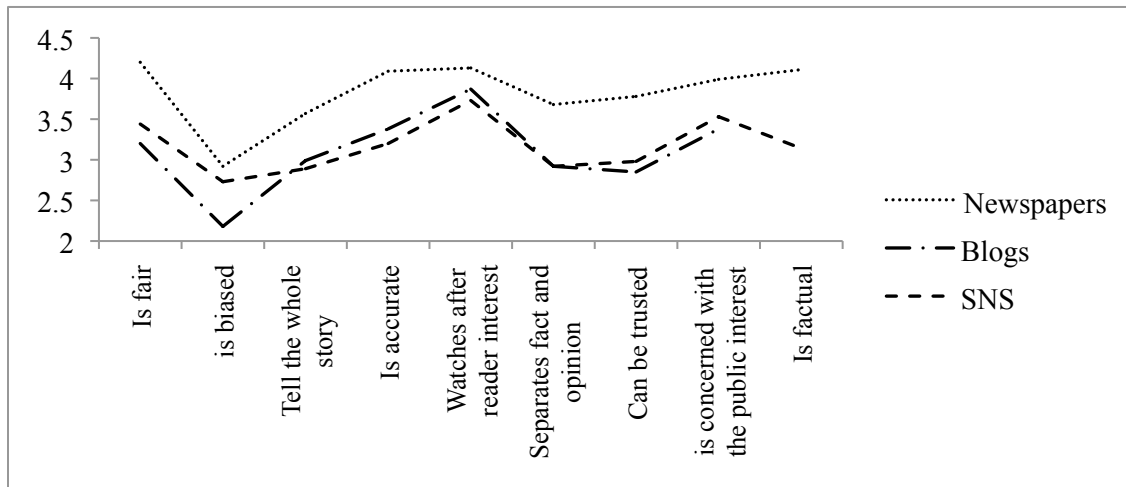
Figure 2: Twitter User Perceived Credibility of News and Information Sources



<sup>3</sup> The original survey included ten items. However, when analyzing the data, the item asking participants their level of agreement with a statement, “News and information on Twitter invades people’s privacy” consistently produced negative correlations, so was excluded from the above results. Item-total statistics also consistently revealed that Cronbach’s alpha would be higher (.91) if the item was deleted (.88 before its deletion).

Individuals who do not use Twitter also rank online newspapers as the most credible source of news and information. Although they were not asked to rate the credibility of Twitter, they ranked social networking sites generally as the least credible source, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Non-Twitter User Perceived Credibility of News and Information Sources



*Credibility of Tweets by Politicians.* A fourth research question asked how people perceive the credibility of tweets by politicians, and both Twitter users and non-users responded. Using a 7-point scale, five different tweets were used to measure credibility. Full results are shown in Table 4. Participants considered the interactive tweet the most reliable ( $M=5.09$ ), most informed ( $M=5.05$ ), and most qualified tweet ( $M=4.94$ ) while both partisan opinionated tweets were considered least reliable ( $M=4.01$ ), least informed ( $M_{Dem}=4.09$ ,  $M_{Rep}=4.15$ ) and least qualified ( $M_{Dem}=4.05$ ,  $M_{Rep}=4.10$ ). Notably, the interactive tweet was also viewed as most intelligent ( $M=4.76$ ), most valuable ( $M=5.01$ ), and most expert ( $M=4.50$ ) while the personal tweet was considered least intelligent

(M=3.87), least valuable (M=3.27), and least expert (M=3.46). However, the personal tweet ranked highest in the remaining items, including honesty (M=5.05), pleasantness (M=5.30), and, conversely, selfishness (M=4.04). Additionally, both opinionated tweets ranked lowest for these items. Results from independent t-tests revealed no significant differences between the perceived credibility of the personal tweet by a U.S. Senator by Twitter users and non-users.

Table 4: Credibility of Tweets by Politicians

	Mean Rating				
	Personal	Informational	Dem-leaning opinionated	Rep-leaning opinionated	Interactive
Reliable	4.92	4.80	4.01	4.01	5.09
Informed	4.53	4.88	4.09	4.15	5.05
Qualified	4.41	4.67	4.05	4.10	4.94
Intelligent	3.87	4.21	4.19	3.99	4.76
Valuable	3.27	4.39	3.99	3.98	5.01
Expert	3.46	4.03	3.74	3.71	4.50
Honest	5.05	4.69	3.93	4.20	5.03
Friendly	5.35	4.54	3.80	3.34	5.17
Pleasant	5.30	4.46	3.53	3.48	3.68
Selfish	4.04	3.83	3.53	3.48	3.68

Among Twitter users, there were no significant differences in how males and females or Republicans and Democrats viewed the credibility of all five types of tweets. However, there was a statistically significant difference between how users aged 18-24 and users

aged 25-34 perceived the honesty of the personal tweet at the .003 level; the younger users found the personal tweet more credible.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to indicating their perceptions of the credibility of tweets, respondents were given the opportunity to comment on them, and some of their responses echoed quantitative findings. Many individuals believed the personal tweet by a U.S. Senator gave the politician a humanistic quality. One individual said the tweet was “A personal look at a public figure,” while another noted that tweets about family life away from Washington, “gave the politician a human quality of pride and happiness.” Another individual elaborated on how personal information makes a politician seem more down to Earth, commenting that a “politician tweets about his personal life, but it's kind of cute and charming in a way. It makes you realize he is more than just work and a politician.” Nonetheless, many expressed apathy and cynicism at the motive behind posting information about family life, a theme that emerged from responses to all tweets. Some characterized the personal tweet as self-indulgent or boring. One participant implied that spending time posting content related to family life represents a misplaced priority, asking, “What does this have to do with the way the economy is?” Others believed that political motive to appear more humanistic lurked behind the façade of the personal tweet, even if it appeared benign. For example, one participant commented, “Big whoop. Looks like he/her is trying too hard to appear like a common person?”

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<sup>4</sup> Because a number of statistical tests were conducted, a Bonferroni adjustment was used to ensure that the significance of this item was not due to Type 1 error.

Many comments about the informational tweet mirrored cynical observations concerning the personal post. Some indicated skepticism by claiming that the politician was “trying to stay in the news” or “playing his cards right” in an effort to get reelected, not out of a genuine interest in keeping constituents informed. Others, however, took the information at face value, either sympathizing with a busy work schedule or appreciating the hard work that the public official was spending in his home state. For instance, one participant commented that the tweet was, “informative on what this politician's agenda is for the day. Says a lot about his/her dedication to whatever cause he/she is rallying for,” while another indicated that the official, “is keeping his supporters informed, and it is clear he is working hard to get his message out to people.” Many acknowledged the difficult work that politicians often do to both work in Washington, D.C. and stay informed about issues and events in their home states or districts, although few seemed surprised by the politician’s busy schedule.

While cynicism remained a theme throughout the opinionated tweets, participants seemed to express some frustration at the abbreviated nature of how the politicians whose tweets were used chose to agree or disagree with a current political event. Many perceived the tweets as overly vague or indicated that they lacked adequate information to back up the partisan assertions. For example, one individual noted that the Democratic-leaning tweet was a claim, but included no explanation. Another said, “It's about an issue too huge to give out accurate information via twitter.” Several characterized both opinionated tweets as “propaganda” while others either agreed or disagreed with the assertion depending on whether it mirrored their political leanings.

Respondents were consistently less skeptical of the motives behind the interactive tweet. Some dismissed the value of the tweet, which communicated information to followers about how to attend a town-hall meeting, characterizing it as useless or boring in the same vein as the other examples of tweets by politicians. Yet many of the comments revealed that participants believed the tweet was inviting or useful. For one participant, “the tweet [sought] participation.” For another, it included the “best tone overall” of any tweet. Another thought it was “one of the only things twitter is worthwhile for.” Many of the individuals who believed that public officials had ulterior motives to posting content in most situations seemed to indicate that the interactive tweet was genuine.

*Motivations and Usefulness of Twitter.* In addition to responding to open-ended questions specifically related to the five tweets by politicians, participants were given the opportunity to answer two supplementary questions. The first asked what motivations they thought politicians specifically had for using the communication medium while the second asked participants what they regarded as the most useful aspect of Twitter. Many echoed the sentiments revolving around cynicism and indicated that a primary motive for public officials may be self-interest. For example, some thought the main objective was to “get votes” or to market his or her candidacy. Others said it was to “keep their name in the media,” to attain publicity without having to answer specific questions, or to push their “political agendas.” Some respondents were especially skeptical of motives, noting that the principle motive may be to, “Relay party propaganda, creat[e] opinion, and an



inflated sense of ego/narcisistic [sic] personality,” or for “furthering their own careers and trying to discredit thier [sic] opponent.”

However, two others strong themes emerged. First, many individuals considered Twitter a useful medium for politicians to use to reach out to young voters. One participant noted that “Twitter is a great resource for reaching the Gen X/Millennial generation; politicians are wise to try to draw from every pool of qualified voters, including the 20-somethings,” while another said the primary motives of a politician may be, “connecting to the younger generation, and staying relevant.” In sum, reaching a younger demographic may be a way for politicians to attain votes but may also be an increasingly important way to connect with Web-saavy and Web-reliant individuals.

Others believed the chief motivation was to keep constituents and the public informed by conveying relevant information to those who are interested in politics enough to listen. For example, one respondent noted that politicians might use Twitter to “provide quick information on their thoughts for their representative public,” or for, “keeping the public informed of their day-to-day agendas and opinions.” In other words, they thought politicians could use Twitter to help constituents and other followers keep a finger on the pulse of what’s happening on the forefront of lawmaking.

Although many who offered thoughts on the general usefulness of the site did not see its merits, most participants who had positive things to say about the Website valued how it enables users to get information quickly and frequently. Many individuals expressed negative sentiments toward the site, indicating that “nothing” about Twitter is useful, or offered thoughts on social networking sites in general, contending that they are

“invasive and untrustworthy” or “promote selfishness” and considered Twitter “just another site for people to talk about themselves.” However, comments praising the information seeking and sharing qualities of Twitter were common. One participant identified “instant knowledge” as its most useful aspect of the site. Others said that, “you are up to date on things going on across the world,” can “keep up with news and local events,” can obtain “real time information,” and that it allows one to get a “quick [and] easy snapshot of what the people you are following are doing.”

Consequently, for these participants, Twitter is most useful for receiving relevant information in a timely fashion. Several others noted the ability to create a conversation on Twitter. For instance, one participant suggested, “Twitter's useful for creating conversations about certain topics that people find relevant to their situations and interests,” while several others identified how it “allows several people to connect and share opinions, ideas, and thoughts on any issue imaginable.” Some also identified Twitter’s entertainment value as its primary usefulness, noting that that they may not turn to it for in-depth information but do use it to keep tabs on celebrity gossip.

### Chapter 3: Twitter Revolution or Stagnation?

This study was conducted to identify who is on Twitter, understand how they use the service, and grasp how they view the credibility of content posted to it by politicians. Findings from the study show that individuals largely use the site for entertainment and to connect to others in a variety of ways, reasons similar to those that other scholars have identified as motives for logging on to social networking sites in general (Lenhart & Fox, 2009). However, Twitter users indicate that the temporal qualities of the site are also what make it worth using. Although some participants are wary of the political motives behind the use of the site by public officials, many acknowledge the potential for politicians to share many different kinds of information with citizens who are willing to listen.

The profile of the self-defined politically informed Twitter user mirrors findings from other research that has sought to classify the characteristics of those who tweet. The majority of users in this study are female (59.3%), a finding supported by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (2009), which found that 21% of all female adults who go online use Twitter or a similar service, as compared to 19% of male adults who are online, as of October, 2009. The average Twitter user, who is age 34, is older than the typical user of other social networking sites, with the exception of the career networking site LinkedIn, a professional network where the average user is age 40 (Pew, 2009). While this study did not ask respondents to identify their profession, marketers and researchers alike have speculated that Twitter users may generally be older than the

average user of other social networking sites because they can use it as a way to get information and build a professional network, and because unlike some social networking sites, Twitter is fairly easy to use.

Notably, almost all Twitter users in this study had a high level of education, and 96% of users had at least some college experience. Given that education and income are highly correlated, the high education levels of Twitter users may imply a growing social media digital divide. Many researchers have contended that those with easier access to Internet are generally better informed, and this gap is growing. Since the ease and mobility of Twitter, as well as the temporal qualities of how people are using it, allow individuals to get a constant stream of any type of information they want on their own terms and in a highly efficient way, those without the service arguably lag behind and have a more limited ability to understand what is happening in the world or in a particular community at any given moment.

Results from the study yield important information about how people specifically use Twitter. Many individuals have employed the service to interact with friends, and over two-thirds of participants said they either sometimes or regularly used the site to do so. The tendency to use social media as a forum for social interaction is not a new phenomenon. Yet the wide range of individuals, sources, and organizations that study participants indicated following reveals that users log on to Twitter for a variety of content.

Although almost all of those who tweet have posted information about themselves on the site, mostly detailing what they are doing or thinking, many use it to push

information produced by others to their own network of followers. Notably, over half of respondents said they re-post content that is not their own, including links to audio, photos, or multimedia content, and nearly two-thirds frequently post links to news or information. Although many respondents who did not use Twitter, and indeed some critics at large, expressed that they thought the site seems to be dominated by people who prefer to use it to promote their egoism, individuals do appear to use it to share newsworthy content.

The propensity for users to push information from other sources indicates two important findings. First, it signifies that politically informed individuals use Twitter to not only network with individuals, but to share information with them. Second, their tendency to share information may influence how uninformed users learn about the news, assuming that they have followers who lack political knowledge but who may be exposed to political information through Twitter. Arguably, the use of Twitter by individuals to push interesting content may alter how news sources view the importance of their own social media efforts. The secondary distribution of news content through social networking sites may become a more critical component of spreading news and information to a wider audience, even as attention to some media sources declines.

Fewer than half of individuals in this study have used Twitter to send a message or reply to something posted by a politician. U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill, among other public officials, has identified the interactive component of Twitter as one of its most promising features, noting that it “is a fairly decent way to stay connected” (2009). Study participants echo her sentiment, expressing less cynicism toward interactive tweets than

personal or opinionated tweets. Yet only a quarter of study participants indicated sometimes or regularly replying to a politician, signaling a disparity between how individuals view the potential for Twitter to become a source for interaction and the actual interactive practice taking place on the site. The possibility for Twitter to change how people engage in two-way communication with their elected representatives, which some have called potentially revolutionary (Johnson, 2009) is not yet evident. Interestingly, though, Republicans appear to be more likely to respond to a tweet by a politician than either Democrats or Independents. Evidence does not suggest that party affiliation influence one's propensity to engage politicians online. Yet one explanation could be that those who are politically informed and identify as a member of a political party that occupies a minority presence in Congress and is not represented in the White House may have a desire to voice their concerns.

With regards to uses and gratifications, individuals have largely identified entertainment, interpersonal utility, and temporal utility as the main motivations for using Twitter. Over half (57.2%) of individuals said that the statement, "I use Twitter because it's entertaining" applied to them. This finding parallels past research on motivations for not only using social networking sites, but for using earlier forms of media as well. Much of this scholarship has found that entertainment is a primary motivation for using media broadly (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Ancu & Cozma, 2009). Users also indicated their desire to use Twitter for its social qualities. Over 40% of study participants said the statement, "I use twitter to pass on information to others" applied to them, while 39.8% of respondents agreed that the statement, "I use Twitter to give me things to talk about"

also applied. boyd and Ellison (2007), among other scholars who have highlighted the social interactive components of social media, have argued that these sites may primarily be used among youth for a superficial kind of interactions like “super-poking” friends rather than for a kind of information-sharing interaction (p. 11). Although younger users do tend to tweet content about themselves more often than others, Twitter users do seem to consider the service to be a useful tool that enables them to interact with peers both online and offline when it comes to sharing content, as described above. Respondents also noted some agreement within a decisional utility factor. Just over 47% said that they use Twitter to find out what other people find are important issues of the day. While categorized as a component of decision-making, agreement with this statement is not necessarily a surprise, given the importance of interpersonal utility as a chief motivation for logging onto the site.

Interestingly, study participants largely did not agree with statements that sought to address their use of Twitter for information seeking purposes. Only 29.8% of individuals said that the statement, “I use Twitter to keep up with current issues” applied to them compared to 51% who said it did not apply. This finding is somewhat at odds with responses to the open-ended question asking participant to identify what they find most useful about the social networking site, because respondents who used Twitter often suggested that the ability to get a running feed of information is a primary benefit of the site. The finding also contradicts some of the uses and gratifications research on the Internet, much of which concludes that people do go online for information (Stafford and Gonier, 2004).

However, participants' responses to uses and gratifications questions concerning temporal utility may help shed light on the discrepancy. Nearly 45% of individuals said the statement, "I use Twitter to know what happens when it happens" applied to them. Quantitative and qualitative responses indicate that Twitter users view the site's temporal qualities as its most important feature. One explanation for the somewhat confounding finding that users go onto the site for timely content rather than specifically for news material may be that Twitter users do not use the site as their primary medium for news and information, but do rely on it to get information in a timely, efficient, and convenient manner. They may use it to get a sense of what is happening around the world, occurring in their community at any given time, or to understand public sentiment about a particular event or issue, but might use other Websites as their principal sources for more in-depth information. This finding may counter arguments made by critics of social media who say that the medium does little to change how people engage because it only condenses and simplifies multifaceted issues (Bai, 2009). Although users included in this study indicate high levels of education and may be more likely to seek out detailed information regardless of the medium, Twitter appears to compliment rather than substitute how users typically get new and information.

The study reveals several important findings concerning how individuals perceive the credibility of Twitter as a medium, but none that are necessarily surprising or different from past research. Online newspapers were ranked highest on all positive items in the credibility scale used to measure it. Other research that compares the credibility of various online sources has found similar results (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). Twitter,



however, ranks second highest among online sources included in the study, above both blogs and social networking sites broadly. Past credibility studies have also found that individuals are more likely to view sources they rely on for information and other content as credible sources, which may explain why the medium was ranked highly (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Another explanation may be that users choose who to follow and ideally would not choose to follow sources, be they organizations, friends, or business, which push out erroneous or misleading content.

Findings show a more complicated view of how citizens perceive tweets by politicians. Of all five tweets by politicians used in the study, the interactive tweet was considered most credible, as it ranked highest on items that asked if it was reliable, informed, qualified, intelligent, valuable, and expert. Open-ended responses support this view, and many study participants regarded the opportunity for interaction as a potentially useful tool for politicians interested in communicating directly with citizens. Although cynicism was a dominant theme in user responses, people were generally less skeptical of a politician's motives when it came to the interactive tweet as compared to those that were personal, informational, or opinionated, even if those individuals were not likely to interact with a politician themselves. As many scholars have noted, political cynicism has remained high in recent years (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Pew, 2003) and politicians may do well to know that interactive tweets could be one way to communicate with constituents or other individuals without those individuals questioning the motive behind their efforts. Both scholars who study the role of new media in communication and researchers outside of academia who are interested in curbing political cynicism in an

age dominated by social media may want to further explore the interactivity of tweets and the positive perception of their credibility. Important questions may examine the nature of interactive tweets, investigate whether they make individuals less cynical toward the political process, or explore whether attitudes toward interactive tweets seemingly posted by politicians themselves differ from attitudes toward posts by a staffer.

Personal tweets may also help contrast against the image of a traditional politician as untrustworthy. Although respondents consistently rated the personal tweet the least valuable, expert, intelligent, and most selfish, they also considered it the most honest and pleasant. Both quantitative and qualitative findings show that personal tweets do give a more human quality to politicians who use Twitter to talk about his or her personal life outside of politics. While some believe the point of tweeting about personal life is an inherently political intention when the person doing so is a public figure, the personal tweet does appear to humanize public officials to some degree.

Nevertheless, the perception of political motive may inhibit the widespread use of Twitter as a true method for bridging the gap between politicians and citizens and may explain consistently low means associated with items included on the credibility scales for tweets by politicians. Opinionated tweets ranked lowest on the items measuring pleasantness and honesty, indicating that people react negatively to elected officials' sharing partisan content. The perceived credibility of informational tweets ranked in the middle on all items, revealing that individuals do not necessarily view information pushed by politicians as either credible or not credible. While they may be somewhat

interested in what an elected official has to say, they may not rely on politicians for information.

Both Twitter users and non-users note the site's potential as a revolutionary contribution to communication. Many study participants suggested that politicians can use the medium as a way to engage youth and possibly tap into a constituency not automatically interested in politics or public affairs, but who can be attracted through their interest in social media and interpersonal interactions. Youth are not necessarily using Twitter in droves, but they are certainly engaging online more than ever before, as are an increasing number of adults. Many forms of traditional media such as print newspapers and radio have recognized the merits of using social media to cast a wider net to attract readers or listeners. Politicians who learn how to use social media effectively may be able to draw in a larger number of supporters, or at least potential voters who are willing to listen to their messages. Participants also suggest that interactive components of Twitter may also uniquely position politicians to curb components of cynicism. On Twitter, they can start and carry on a conversation if they are able to use it effectively.

Individuals also note how Twitter expands the ability for users to be informed and suggest this is one of the site's biggest benefits. Although politicians are able to share information with their audience, users are able to receive and share information with a large network of users, each of whom chooses to share a variety of information on a vast array of topics. That nearly half of Twitter users log on to receive a current feed of the latest information shows that its ability to keep people informed has changed how users find out about important issues. Surprisingly, virtually no respondents suggested that

Twitter may be most useful because it is free and easy to use. While many were quick to point out the medium's potential as a source for information fast, the ease with which all users, both those who are able to pick up digital technologies quickly and those who are not, and its ability to provide a convenient service for anyone may make it a technology that helps keep all individuals in the information loop.

Twitter also provides enormous opportunities for future research. Although this study did not ask respondents about the extent to which they use Twitter as a primary source for information, future studies may seek to explore how those who log on to Twitter use the site compared to online newspapers or blogs which frequently offer more complex description and analysis of an event or issue. This study shows that people tend to post links to other material. However, no study has yet examined whether users, or various kinds of users, actually click through links to audio, news, photo or video content, or simply read a tweet with a link and move on. Investigating this question may help scholars determine whether social networking sites where users must often abbreviate messages serves to further knowledge acquisition. Lastly, scholars have yet to address the authenticity of posts by politicians. Tweets included in this study at least appeared to be sent by politicians themselves, but elected officials often have staff members tweet for them. Whether users perceive tweets as being sent by actual politicians may alter how they view the credibility of tweets and of the politicians who hold accounts.

## Chapter 4: Realizing the Potential of Twitter

Twitter users log on to the site for three primary reasons: to get a snapshot of information about what's happening in the world around them, to interact with others, and to be entertained. While they may not specifically use the site as their primary source of information and indicate that they do not necessarily use it for news, users generally find that Twitter provides them with the opportunity to be current with the latest content, whether it is a tweet from a favorite friend, politician, or business. While cynicism is widespread—and individuals are not hesitant to talk the negative aspects of politics or how Twitter may be used by elected officials to further their supposed self-indulgent motives—researchers have yet to determine whether the interactivity of the site can help make people less skeptical of the political process and their elected representatives. Yet people do largely believe that tweets by politicians that appear to seek interaction are credible, even if tweets that include partisan information are not.

Whether or not individuals follow politicians, they are using Twitter in important ways. They not only tweet content about themselves to whoever is willing to follow them or listen, but use the site to share and distribute content that they find relevant, interesting, or noteworthy. Users' tendency to push a variety of information from other sources may help bring news, regardless of its topic. They also choose to follow a variety of sources, indicating that users are interested in an array of topics and use the site as a way to get content on any number of subjects.

Although scholars who study social media use among youth and adults have argued both for and against the merits of social networking sites like Twitter as valuable and innovative sources for news and information related to politics and public policy, its potential has still to be fully recognized. Quantitative and qualitative findings show that the interactive capabilities provided by Twitter are the site's most innovative features, especially when it comes to interacting with elected officials, people who are often deemed unapproachable or unable to listen to public sentiment. However, individuals are not necessarily using it to communicate directly with politicians. Few individuals say they have used Twitter as a vehicle with which to talk to or reply to an elected official. It is not yet known whether politicians who use Twitter value or respond to the information that does get communicated back to them, either.

Some have called the widespread use of Twitter and the functionality it allows a revolutionary tool, and many may continue to do so as it spreads to millions more users around the world. But its innovativeness comes with a caveat. Twitter provides new opportunities for communication and learning, but users have not all fully embraced its interactive capabilities.

## Appendix A: Uses & Gratifications and Credibility Survey

1. Please check one box per row to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about ONLINE NEWSPAPERS.

They are fair  
They are biased  
They tell the whole story  
They are accurate  
They invade people's privacy  
They watch after readers' interests  
They separate fact and opinion  
They can be trusted  
They are concerned about the public interest  
They are factual  
They have well-trained reporters

Measured on a seven-item scale using: Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neutral, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree

2. Please check one box per row to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about NEWS/POLITICS BLOGS.<sup>5</sup>

They are fair  
They are biased  
They tell the whole story  
They are accurate  
They invade people's privacy  
They watch after readers' interests  
They separate fact and opinion  
They can be trusted  
They are concerned about the public interest  
They are factual  
They have well-trained reporters

3. Please check one box per row to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about news and information posted by people you know on SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES.

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<sup>5</sup> Questions 2, 3, and 6 were measured using the 7-item scale described in question 1.

They are fair  
They are biased  
They tell the whole story  
They are accurate  
They invade people's privacy  
They watch after readers' interests  
They separate fact and opinion  
They can be trusted  
They are concerned about the public interest  
They are factual  
They have well-trained reporters

4. Do you have an account on the social networking site TWITTER?

Yes  
No

5. In a typical week, how often are you on Twitter?

Multiple times a day  
Daily  
A few times a week  
Once a week  
Less than once a week

6. Please check one box per row to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about NEWS AND INFORMATION ON TWITTER.

They are fair  
They are biased  
They tell the whole story  
They are accurate  
They invade people's privacy  
They watch after readers' interests  
They separate fact and opinion  
They can be trusted  
They are concerned about the public interest  
They are factual

7. Please check the box that corresponds with how much each statement about NEWS AND INFORMATION ON TWITTER applies to you. If the reason definitely applies, give it a 5. If it does not apply at all, give it a 1. If it applies somewhere in between, give it a 2, 3, or 4 depending on how much it applies.



*Information Seeking*

I read news and information on Twitter to keep up with current issues.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter so I won't be surprised by higher prices and things.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter because you can trust the information they give you.

1 2 3 4 5

*Decisional Utility*

I read news and information on Twitter to find out what kind of job our government officials are doing.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter to help me make up my mind about the important issues of the day.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter to find out about issues affecting people like myself.

1 2 3 4 5

*Entertainment*

I read news and information on Twitter because it's entertaining.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter because it's often dramatic.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter because it's often exciting.

1 2 3 4 5

*Interpersonal Utility*

I read news and information on Twitter to support my own viewpoints to other people.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter so I can pass information on to other people.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter to give me interesting things to talk about.

1 2 3 4 5

*Temporal Utility*

I read news and information on Twitter to know what happens as soon as it happens.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter to know what happens before everyone else.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter because it's an efficient way to learn about what's happening.

1 2 3 4 5

*Parasocial Interaction*

I read news and information on Twitter because it gives a human quality to the news.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter to compare my own ideas to the ideas of people I follow.

1 2 3 4 5

I read news and information on Twitter

because I want to know what other think  
are important stories of the day.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. On Twitter, do you follow:

Friends	Yes	No
Family	Yes	No
Actors/actresses	Yes	No
Sports figures	Yes	No
Politicians or other public officials	Yes	No
News sources	Yes	No
Journalists	Yes	No
Political pundits	Yes	No
Businesses	Yes	No
Other	Yes	No

9. Please indicate whether you participate in each activity on Twitter regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never.

	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Post information about where you are or what you are doing	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Post information about politics or news	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Post links to photos, video, or audio content	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Post links to news articles	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Reply to a post by a friend or family member	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Reply to a post by a politician or public official	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never

Reply to a post by an actor or celebrity	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Re-post information about politics or news	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Re-post links to photos, video, or audio content	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Re-post links to news articles	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never

10. Imagine you are following a U.S. politician who posts the following tweet on Twitter:  
 "My children came over tonight and cooked supper for my birthday and even cleaned up afterward. What a nice birthday."

- Reliable
- Informed
- Qualified
- Intelligent
- Valuable
- Expert
- Honest
- Friendly
- Pleasant
- Selfish

Measured on a seven-item scale using: Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neutral, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

11. If you were to describe this tweet to a friend, what would you say about it?

12. Imagine you are following a U.S. politician who posts the following tweet on Twitter:  
 "Door to door today in Muskegon. Later on today w Ray Franz. Just keep plugging. Doing what is necessary to keep message out there."<sup>6</sup>

- Reliable
- Informed

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<sup>6</sup> Questions 12, 14, 16, and 18 used this 7-item scale as well.

Qualified  
Intelligent  
Valuable  
Expert  
Honest  
Friendly  
Pleasant  
Selfish

13. If you were to describe this tweet to a friend, what would you say about it?

14. Imagine you are following a U.S. politician who posts the following tweet on Twitter:  
"After 8 years of Bush budgets designed to short change our national priorities,  
the Obama budget lays out a plan for the future."

Reliable  
Informed  
Qualified  
Intelligent  
Valuable  
Expert  
Honest  
Friendly  
Pleasant  
Selfish

15. If you were to describe this tweet to a friend, what would you say about it?

16. Imagine you are following a U.S. politician who posts the following tweet on Twitter:  
"The President's budget spends too much, taxes too much and borrows too much,  
and the American people know it - <http://is.gd/mKsT> #tcot"

Reliable  
Informed  
Qualified  
Intelligent  
Valuable  
Expert  
Honest  
Friendly  
Pleasant  
Selfish

17. If you were to describe this tweet to a friend, what would you say about it?

18. Imagine you are following a U.S. politician who posts the following tweet on Twitter:  
"Want to take part in my teletown hall tonight? Sign up on my website on the bottom left hand side!"

Reliable  
Informed  
Qualified  
Intelligent  
Valuable  
Expert  
Honest  
Friendly  
Pleasant  
Selfish

19. If you were to describe this tweet to a friend, what would you say about it?

20. Generally speaking, what motives do you think politicians have for using Twitter?

21. Generally speaking, what do you find most useful about Twitter?

22. Generally speaking, how much do you enjoy keeping up with the news?

A lot            Some            Not much            Not at all            Don't know/depends

23. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a:

Strong Republican  
Weak Republican  
Independent, leaning toward Republican  
Independent  
Independent, leaning toward Democrat  
Weak Democrat  
Strong Democrat  
Other  
Don't know  
Prefer not to answer

24. At the end of November, 2009, how many additional troops did President Obama recently vow to send to Afghanistan?

10,000  
20,000  
30,000  
Don't know

25. Which political party currently has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives

Democrat  
Republican  
Don't know

26. What is the last name of the couple that recently crashed a White House dinner party?

27. What is your age?

28. What is your gender?

Female  
Male  
Other

29. What is your highest level of education completed?

Less than high school  
High school diploma/GED  
Some college  
Two-year college degree (Associate's)  
Four-year college degree (BA/BS)  
Master's degree  
Doctoral degree  
Professional degree (JD/MD)

30. What category or categories best describes your racial background?

White  
African-American or Black  
Asian/Pacific Islander  
Native American  
Something else  
Prefer not to answer

## **Appendix B: List of Cities Where Survey Was Posted**

Albany, NY	Memphis, TN
Albuquerque, NM	Miami, FL
Atlanta, GA	Minneapolis, MN
Austin, TX	Nashville, TN
Baltimore, MD	New Orleans, LA
Birmingham, AL	New York, NY
Boston, MA	Northern Virginia, VA
Charlotte, NC	Oklahoma City, OK
Chicago, IL	Orlando, FL
Cleveland, OH	Philadelphia, PA
Dallas, TX	Phoenix, AZ
Denver, CO	Raleigh, NC
Des Moines, IA	Providence, RI
Detroit, MI	Richmond, VA
El Paso, TX	Sacramento, CA
Houston, TX	San Antonio, TX
Indianapolis, IN	San Diego, CA
Kansas City, MO	San Francisco, CA
Los Angeles, CA	Seattle, WA
Madison, WI	St. Louis, MO



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## Vita

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