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Original Article

Coproduction or cooptation? Real-time spin and social media response during the 2012 French and US presidential debates

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Abstract Major political events now unfold in a hybrid political information cycle: even as millions of citizens tune in to television broadcasts, many also comment – and receive others' comments – over social media. In previous research, we have described how biobehavioral cues spur Twitter discussion of candidates during American presidential debates. Here we extend that research to also account for other elements of the communication environment – in particular, messages from political and media elites reaching them via a 'second screen' such as mobile phone or tablet – and we apply our analyses to debates in both the United States and France. Specifically, we examine the relationship between the Twitter posts of 300 politicians, organizations and media figures from each country and the relevant messages of the larger Twitterverse during the debates. Our findings reveal commonalities in social media response in the two countries, particularly the powerful role of party figures and pundits in spurring social media posting. We also note differences between the social media cultures of the two countries, including the finding that French elites commanded relatively more attention (in the form of retweets) than their American counterparts. Implications for debate evaluations and online expression are discussed.
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Introduction

Presidential elections are nearly unparalleled in their capacity to focus citizen attention, and in the course of elections, debates rank second only to Election Day in terms of real-time expression on social media (Sharp, 2012a, b). They are unique moments in which candidates present themselves before their nation, and members of the public react to, discuss and evaluate the performances. And despite the fragmentation of media systems and audiences of developed democracies such as France and the United States (Prior, 2007), debates continue to command the attention of large portion of the citizenry as they have for decades (Stelter, 2012).

What is unprecedented, however, is the complexity of the media environment that now surrounds debates and confronts the campaigns, journalists and spectators who take part. In 1984, when the 'spin room', the post-debate gathering in which each campaign tried to sell reporters on their candidates' performance, was first identified, campaigns could work through a defined set of news entities during a day-long news cycle to convey messages to the public (Calderone, 2012). Today, that news cycle has given way to a real-time 'political information cycle', as myriad campaign operatives, journalists, pundits, bloggers, celebrities and citizens weigh in immediately on events (Chadwick, 2013; Vaccari *et al*, 2015).

This is not a wholesale displacement of broadcast media in favor of digital: individuals continue to respond strongly to images that reach them via television (Shah *et al*, 2015). Today viewers respond to the 'first screen' of television with one or more 'second screens': the laptops, tablets and smartphones that connect them to friends and other networks through messaging, E-mail and social media (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2011; Giglietto and Selva, 2014, Freelon and Karpf, 2015).

We build on previous work showing that candidates' performances in televised debates (especially their 'biobehavioral cues' such as facial expressions and gestures) have a discernable impact on contemporaneous Twitter posting about the candidates (Shah *et al*, 2015). In this study, we wish to recognize that many citizens are receiving messages from (at least) two screens when watching debates (McKinney *et al*, 2014), and that political and media actors are themselves working feverishly to take advantage of that divided attention to shape the public's interpretation of debates as they occur, not just afterwards (Kreiss, 2014). The place- and time-bound spin rooms of broadcast media still exist, but now also have digital manifestations that need not wait for debate's end: commentators, spinners, pundits and others comment on debates *in real time* via social media like Twitter. We know this is occurring, but we know little about how this elite discourse impacts larger social media discussions surrounding the debate (though see Trilling, 2015). To account for this feature of the contemporary media event, in this study we measure when political and media elites enter the Twitter discussion about a debate, and assess what consequences it has for aggregate Twitter response.

The essay proceeds as follows. We first situate presidential debates in the class of 'media events' originally theorized during the height of the broadcast media system by Dayan and Katz (1992), but note that the form and implications of such events are undergoing change along without media system (Chadwick, 2010; Freelon and Karpf, 2015). This gives debates an intriguing dual quality of being both highly produced and polished broadcast spectacles and the sites of real-time discussion, debate and contestation of meaning in social media. We highlight questions of how interactions between journalists, campaigns and citizens commenting via social media shape that contestation.

To examine these questions empirically, we draw on Twitter data collected during the 2012 presidential debates in both the United States and France. These allow us to assess the contributions of various actors to the response from the larger Twitter 'public' – the general viewers who choose to comment on Twitter during the debates. Further, comparing Twitter responses to debates in two countries allows for the examination of our questions in contexts with obvious similarities but also substantial differences of politics, media system and social media use.

The Debate as Media Event

In the United States and France, debates are institutionalized rituals of every presidential election. Debates are carried, without advertisements, by leading television networks and the cable channels primarily dedicated to news. In 2012, the first American debate drew a television audience of over 70 million viewers, just shy of the record of over 80 million in 1980 (Stelter, 2012). In France, since the liberalization of the television market in the mid-1980s, the biggest commercial station, formerly public broadcaster TF1, has aired the debates. Debates regularly reach over 20 million viewers, with that of 2012 garnering an audience share of over 60 per cent (Bailly, 2012).

As such, debates loom among the largest of the class of communication moments known as 'media events' (Dayan and Katz, 1992). Dayan and Katz conceptualize media events as being ritualized (placed in a conventionally prescribed and ordered form), highly staged (by journalistic media and campaign strategists), of high strategic stakes, and social (for millions of citizen observers, who may watch as members of a group or at the least expect to encounter conversations about the event in the future).

In the social media age, these general features of media events persist, partly because audiences for broadcast coverage of them continue to tune in, as noted above. But as the broadcast media with which the modern debate format emerged – indeed, co-evolved – is now accompanied by the panoply of media forms enabled by the Internet, the features and roles identified by Dayan and Katz are taking on new

forms (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2011; Jungherr, 2014; Vaccari *et al*, 2015). We now witness *hybrid media events*, which we define as events in which there is convergence and real-time interaction of: (i) the coverage of broadcast and journalistic media; (ii) the strategic messaging and spin of interested actors (that is, campaigns and parties); and (iii) the commentary and debate of citizens using various social platforms. While recognizing the 'blurring' of these analytic distinctions in post-Web 2.0 campaigning (Lilleker and Jackson, 2013, p. 150), we nonetheless seek to observe and account for how these interactions play out in today's hybrid media events.

For theoretical underpinnings of hybrid media events, we build on three features of the media environment surrounding them: the disintermediation of political communications in the sense that strategic actors who formally relied on news media to reach all but a tiny activated minority now communicate alongside those news media; the disappearance of the temporal boundaries of the news cycle, or *political communication in real time*; and the social media commentary that now forms a vibrant component of that political communication.

Disintermediation

The relationship between the two key producers of political communications, and debates especially – political campaigns and news media – has been fundamentally altered. Partly because news organizations formally host them, debates have long been opportunities for journalists to showcase their own credentials and perform their responsibilities as the public's voice: asking the candidates' questions, trying to navigate the spin rooms and assiduously fact-checking campaigns' statements. But 'hypermedia' now enable politicians and campaigns to reach publics directly, without the mediation of journalists (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010).

For political campaigns, debates have always been fraught moments of loss of message control. Before hypermedia, campaigns responded to this situation with the development of 'spin room': after whatever happened in the candidates' brief unscripted performance, handlers gathered to meet journalists and reframe, or 'spin' the story, as debate coverage was likely to dominate news coverage for the next several days (Calderone, 2012). French campaigns have their somewhat comparable 'war room' (*quartier générale*) located apart from party headquarters. There, politicians close to the candidates and other strategic advisers work to shape the media agenda, to reply to the opposing campaign and to spin the story on behalf of their candidate.

With the development of the hypermedia campaign (Howard, 2006), the meaning and significance of debate moments shift subtly. On the one hand, the ever-greater ubiquity of finely targeted and crafted advertising and careful press management during the rest of the (especially extended American) campaign brings the rarity of unfiltered candidate performance into ever sharper relief. Perhaps this accounts for

the sustained large audiences for broadcast debates well into the social media era. On the other hand, hypermedia makes it possible for campaigns and other communication actors to intervene in the midst of a debate – to digitally interrupt the candidates in a way that was not possible before.

The development of these practices constitutes a sort of *real-time spin* carried out via social media. As Kreiss (2014) details, both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama's campaigns in 2012 took great pains to prepare sophisticated social media strategies for moments when they knew the public's (and journalists') attention would be on them – above all during debates (see Elmer, 2013 for comparable findings in Canada). This practice is empirically justified by the fact that social media activity – and therefore attention – follows the live coverage of political events in broadcast media, and falls quickly with its end (Hanna *et al*, 2013; Jungherr, 2014).

Political Communication in Real Time

The development of first 24-hour news networks, and online and social media thereafter, has also disrupted the temporal features of the broadcast communication system. What was once a 'news cycle' defined by the routines of news organizations is now a 'political information cycle' lacking clear beginning and end points in which a host of actors, including average citizens on Twitter, participate (Chadwick, 2013). This has changed the nature of communication work for journalists and campaigns alike, as they work feverishly to stay on top of emerging stories and narratives.

The logical extension of the political information cycle is that much political communication now happens not in a cycle at all – which itself implies recurring, and therefore finite, stages – but in real time. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the growth of audience practices of 'second screening' or 'dual screening': viewing multiple sources of information about a topic – often a broadcast source such as television in combination with a social media source such as Twitter (Gil de Zúñiga *et al*, 2015; Shah *et al*, 2015; Vaccari *et al*, 2015). The simultaneity of such practices encapsulates the 'timeless time' of information production, reception and response in the network society (Castells, 1996).

These realities have political campaigns acutely aware of the need to seize even relatively small opportunities to communicate their message: 'Campaigns have gone from attempting to win the entire professional journalism news cycle, defined in terms of a 24-hour increment, to focusing on 2 hours on a single social media platform' (Kreiss, 2014, p. 10). New practices for campaigns include developing messaging in advance that could be used during the debate, and responding in real time to debate developments. Interestingly, campaigns understand their primary audience for real-time social messaging to be the general public only secondarily, with higher priority placed on mobilizing already-engaged supporters and journalists, out of the perception that journalists relied on Twitter to gauge public response to the

debate (cf. Lilleker and Jackson, 2013; Kreiss, 2014). This perception is borne out by research on journalists' uses of social media as a proxy of opinion and for story ideas (Chadwick, 2010; Broersma and Graham, 2012; Mercier and Pignard-Cheynel, 2012).

Social Commentary and Online Expression

A third, unmistakable feature of digital political communications is that the audience now talks back. Dayan and Katz (1992) accurately discerned that media events have a multifaceted social component: the same factors that drive so many people to tune in to a given media event also lead them to interact with one another, to gather together, to experience, debate and interpret what happens on the screen: and it is clear that citizens do gather – physically and virtually – to discuss, joke, mock, drink and generally connect over the spectacle (CNN, 2012).

The advent of social media has extended the social nature of these events, allowing the network of connections – and the reach of expressions previously confined to private social spaces – to expand considerably (McKinney *et al*, 2014). Twitter mentions of the major candidates parallels the television viewing audience in spiking sharply upward during debate broadcasts (Hanna *et al*, 2013), demonstrating the wide use of the 'second screen' to share ideas about events occurring on the first (Giglietto and Selva, 2014; Jungherr, 2014). Clearly, citizens are using the new media to say something about the moment of widely shared media experience.

Though demonstrating clear engagement with civic life, this is not to say that the aspects of the performances to which citizens pay the most attention would please every deliberative democratic theorists. In a previous study (Shah *et al*, 2015), we analyzed the first American debate of 2012 on a shot-by-shot basis, mapping the verbal, tonal and visual performances of the candidates to Twitter activity mentioning either participant. What we found was that Twitter users clearly *did* respond to specific moments of the debate: but identifiable responses to candidates' policy arguments were weak and sparse. What largely spurred people to post to Twitter, and shaped the valence of these posts, were much more elemental, 'biobehavioral' cues – candidates' facial expressions and physical gestures, as well as quotable 'meme moments'. When such moments occurred, Twitter users chose to use Twitter to communicate their response to someone.

Exactly who that someone was is beyond the scope of this essay; but the preceding discussion does highlight the multiple valences of communication in a medium that is simultaneously private and public (Papacharissi, 2010). Posting about a debate on Twitter certainly may be an extension of the social space that Dayan and Katz (1992) recognized as a component of media events: people engage in social media activity to be connected to their social network – to share ideas with and receive input from others in their social circle. Alternatively – or simultaneously – it may also be an entry into the domain of the media discourse that is the source of the event itself.

In this sense, commenters are using their media capacity to enter the realm normally controlled by communication elites: their comments become part of a larger conversation, which itself can be aggregated and called upon by journalists and media organizations to make sense of public reaction.

In the latter sense, commenters are engaging in the contestation of political meaning and advantage through communicative means – what some have termed 'media politics', 'communication power' (Castells, 2009) and the 'third age of political communication' (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). However, whereas once television was the 'coproducer' of politics (Gurevitch *et al*, 2009), today social media potentially shares that role – a reality not lost on political strategists who now understand social media as an essential arena for the contestation of political meaning (Conway *et al*, 2015; Lilleker *et al*, 2015). The critical question is to what degree this new media constellation is changing the set of actors empowered to define that meaning, and how the process plays out.

Presidential Debates in France and the United States

Below, we examine how these dynamics unfolded in presidential debates of 2012 in two national contexts: France and the United States. In France, on 2 May, President Nicolas Sarkozy faced off against Francois Hollande in a nearly 3-hour debate; in the United States, on 3 October, sitting President Barack Obama debated Mitt Romney for 90 min. These events offer us the opportunity to test some of the propositions being offered here, and to do so in a cross-national comparative way. Though contemporary research on social media and politics is undoubtedly international, cases of genuinely comparative work remain rare (though see, for example, Lilleker and Jackson, 2013; Vaccari, 2013).

The political cultures of France and the United States prove themselves quite amenable to comparison. The countries have two of the most powerful presidencies in the democratic, developed world, a feature associated with institutionalized debates between competing individuals (in contrast, it was only in 2010 that the United Kingdom saw pre-election debates between its top candidates for Prime Minister; Cockerell, 2010). They also have highly developed media systems, high Internet penetration and relatively high use of Twitter.

In addition to their similarities, differences between the French and American systems offer opportunities for contrast in the uses and consequences of second screen responses to televised debates. Among the most important is the strong polarization around sitting President Sarkozy, which developed during his term of office. The French electorate was divided between Sarkozy supporters and people who hated him. The strong personalization exacerbated the already deep left-right cleavage around which French politics revolves, and the already deeply institutionalized role of parties and partisanship in that country. In all, the relatively high levels

of overt party affiliation, combined with the open affiliation of some news organizations, may lead citizens in France to follow political allies in social media. By contrast, the United States features weaker party loyalty, an almost obsessive journalistic tradition of neutrality, and a norm of 'informed citizenship' by which citizens are called upon to render impartial judgments of politics (Schudson, 1998), including candidates' debate performances. This may lead the press to play a larger role in attracting public attention during debates.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Our notions of the changing nature of debates as media events, our understandings of the French and American contexts for political communication and prior research lead us to several hypotheses and research questions. We first propose that we will indeed see a role played by elite actors in shaping public response to the debate on Twitter beyond the memes generated by candidates and the visual aspects of candidates' expressions and gestures. Accordingly:

Hypothesis 1: The tweeting activity of key political and media elites will explain differences in the volume of online expression directed at each candidate above and beyond what is accounted for by the memes generated by candidates and the visual aspects of candidates' expressions and gestures.

Precisely which elites will play the largest role, and whether the set of elites driving discussion will differ in the two countries, is slightly less clear. We have noted the relatively great importance of party affiliation in France; but our earlier discussion also described the disintermediation of political communications from journalists, which may lead partisan elites to play a similarly important role in the United States. As a result, we pose two research questions:

Research Question 1a: *Which political and media elites explain differences in the volume of online expression during the first presidential debate in the US?*

Research Question 1b: *Which political and media elites explain differences in the volume of online expression during the only second round debate in France?*

Considering the most reproduced Twitter messages during and after media events

Another approach to considering actions of Twitter users and resulting dynamics is to examine which actors' messages are most reproduced by others in terms of those that

were most often retweeted. This is the technique used by Freelon and Karpf (2015) to consider specific moments of debates. They conclude that the second screen phenomenon is opening the doors of discourse to many non-elites, and to many elites outside the political sphere since activity by those commentators sometimes became very prominent via retweets.

Our analysis of the American and French debates in their entirety is a warranted extension for two reasons. First, it would be reasonable to presume that the highly 'meme-ified' moments created by 'Big Bird' and 'horses and bayonets' might be precisely the type most prone to attracting activity and attention from users looking not for substantive, authoritative commentary, but clever quips and humor. Sampling on these cases may thus provide a biased impression of the overall structure of attention during debates. Second, our addition of a second national case allows us to examine the extent to which such a phenomenon of popularization of political discourse, if it exists, is limited to the United States or is a broader phenomenon of online culture.

The critical question, therefore, is to what extent the most reproduced messages are indeed of those elites who already have wide reach with their messages through other media, or whether another set of actors, perhaps those termed 'bridging elites' by Freelon and Karpf (2015) also attract substantial reproduction. Thus:

Research Question 2: *What sorts of Twitter accounts will be most retweeted during and after the debates? And how will the two national contexts differ in the set of most retweeted accounts?*

Method

Twitter data collection and analysis

We archived the Twitter gardenhose as a sample of social media activity through its Streaming API. Twitter describes the gardenhose as a continuous 10 per cent sample of the 300–500 million tweets per day globally.[1] Though the gardenhose is only a sample of Twitter, and not a completely random one, methodological examination – using only a 1 per cent gardenhose stream – suggests that it is valid for purposes such as the ones employed here (Morstatter *et al*, 2013).

From this archive, we drew tweets mentioning the surname of either candidate – Obama and Romney in the US case, Sarkozy and Hollande in the French – with timestamps indicating they were posted during the relevant debate (or within the following 2 hours, for analyses of most-retweeted handles). We then generated volume measures for mentions of each candidate within the text of tweets. Volume measures were broken into small time increments (most were 30 seconds;

see Shah *et al*, 2015) to enable time-series modeling. These became our criterion variables (Tables 3 and 4).

Sampling and categorization of elite Twitter users

To examine Hypothesis 1, we created two lists of individuals active on Twitter who are 'elites' by virtue of their established following or position within the political or media system: one for the United States and one for France. We began by crafting hand-picked lists of 250 of the most influential and well-known handles, guided by a framework of five categories of elites important to political conversations in both countries: 'Advocacy groups' include non-party, political civil society organizations such as the AFL–CIO in the United States and SOS Racisme in France. 'Celebrities' are celebrities known for something other than politics who nonetheless comment on politics. 'Media' are major media organizations such as CNN or LeMonde and mainstream journalists. 'Pundits' are opinion journalists, including overtly partisan journalists, well-known bloggers and satirists. 'Party' handles include accounts belonging to the candidates, campaigns, parties and party leaders. We oversampled the latter three categories to account for their outsized role in shaping political communications.

Then, to ensure we did not miss accounts of great importance, we used our corpus of Twitter posts mentioning the candidates to identify accounts with high number of followers that tweeted at least three times during the debates, and checked this list for elites that did not appear on our initial list. From this set, we drew an additional 50 for each country, resulting in 300 elites for each country (see Appendix Tables A1 and B1 for complete lists of handles and categorization).

Finally, because of the relative sparseness of tweets from the 300 elites within each country (see Tables 1 and 2), for each of the time intervals noted above we generated volume counts of *retweets* of the 300 elites. (We removed any such retweets that mentioned a candidate from our dependent variables to avoid confounding them.) These became our key independent variables.

Time-series regression modeling

To describe the effects of elites' posting (in the form of retweets of those elites) on aggregate Twitter behavior, we estimate time-series regression models. Durbin–Watson tests on each of our dependent variables reveal significant autocorrelation. To account for this temporal dependence, we use generalized least squares (Prais–Winsten) regression to estimate our models. These models adjust the variance-covariance matrix to account for a first-order autoregressive process in the error term of the model. We calculate the adjustment (ρ) using the single-lag OLS estimate of the residuals from the original estimating equation.

Finally, because we are building on previous work relating Twitter activity to televised political events, and to avoid spurious results, we enter into our models the first screen variable blocks that F-tests indicated provided explanatory power, though we do not discuss their results in depth here (for details about the creation and results of these measures in the American case, see Shah *et al*, forthcoming).

Twitter posting as a window onto political communication processes

The use of Twitter as an indicator of public 'response' to political communications must address the question of who is represented in the data. First, the Twitter use is relatively widespread, though by no means ubiquitous, in both France and the United States. In 2012, France had Internet penetration over 80 and 12 per cent of the population over 15 years using Twitter; in the United States, 80 per cent of adults used the Internet, and 16 per cent of those used Twitter (IFOP, 2012; Duggan and Brenner, 2013). Interestingly, however, whereas in France Twitter use is associated with education, young people and white-collar employment (IFOP, 2012), in the United States the service is more distributed across (younger) demographics, with notably high use by African Americans and residents of urban communities (Duggan and Brenner, 2013). Moreover, it has been shown that during high points of politics a relatively large set of users engage in *political* tweeting, not only 'political junkies' (Boyadjian, 2014).

Twitter also has special characteristics that add to its interest as a research domain. We have already noted its high standing among elites such as journalists and strategists; beyond those users, Twitter is also populated by a 'vital middle' of users more active and attuned to politics but not themselves celebrities (Vaccari and Valenturi, 2013). We should be mindful of the likelihood that these individuals' posts make up a significant portion of our measure of response during the debates, but with the awareness that these are opinion leaders positioned between newsmakers and the general public (Lazarsfeld *et al*, 1948). Their reactions thus have significance of their own if we consider that they shape others' understandings of the debate. How that influence may be relayed beyond Twitter space is beyond the scope of this article, but an important question for further research: Does it occur within other social media such as Facebook? Does it move into interpersonal interactions?

Results

Describing the Twitter activity of elites and other users

Tables 1 and 2 describe the contours of our sample in terms of how each category of users engaged in Twitter behavior during the debate and during the 2-hour period

Table 1: Twitter activity of elite and other handles in the United States, during and after the first presidential debate of 2012

	Handles in sample	*Number of tweets*		*Percentage containing @*		*Percentage of retweets*		*Percentage containing links*		*Percentage of hashtags*	
		During	*After*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*
Advocacy groups	48	58	13	1.7	23.1	34.5	38.5	31.0	38.5	51.7	84.6
Celebrities	5	1	0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
Media	97	85	21	3.5	9.5	29.4	33.3	34.1	71.4	49.4	33.3
Party	67	21	3	4.8	0.0	23.8	0.0	9.5	33.3	19.0	33.3
Pundits	83	90	44	5.6	22.7	31.1	13.6	15.6	45.5	30.0	27.3
All others	–	797 267	113 883	2.7	5.8	51.0	61.3	4.3	13.5	31.6	32.0

Table 2: Twitter activity of elite and other handles in France, during and after the presidential debate of 2012

	Handles in sample	*Number of tweets*		*Percentage containing @*		*Percentage of retweets*		*Percentage containing links*		*Percentage of hashtags*	
		During	*After*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*
Advocacy groups	25	0	0	—	—-	—-	—-	—	—	—	—
Celebrities	11	0	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Media	114	99	52	3.0	7.7	13.1	17.3	32.3	40.4	74.1	73.1
Party	88	49	17	8.2	11.8	22.4	35.3	12.2	5.9	93.9	94.1
Pundit	62	43	18	9.3	16.7	20.9	11.1	7.0	16.7	74.4	77.8
All others	–	61 875	22 977	6.5	8.2	49.6	52.9	8.1	12.1	70.4	65.3

immediately following it – the traditional 'spin-room' period. Differences in numbers of tweets between the debate and the post-debate period make clear that the overall level of activity falls rapidly after the end of the debates. We might expect the general audience (all others) not to pay a lot of attention once the debate is over. But the trend is the same for every category of elite users as well, suggesting that the elites are devoting their energies to tweeting during the course of the debate, and that there is not much of a post-debate digital spin room. It is especially notable that journalists and pundits, who presumably are busily talking about the debate on the air, are not promoting their work there during this time – and that party operatives are not busy trying to shape that discussion. The dedicated allocation of energy to the debate itself reflects our earlier discussion of the sense among elite tweeters that it is during the debate, with a mass audience tuned in, that perceptions are importantly shaped. (We should also note the surprising finding that, in France, the handles of both advocacy groups and celebrities were completely silent during the debate and the after-period.)

We also see, in line with studies of other debates (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2011; Jungherr, 2014; Lin *et al*, 2014), that the type of activity changes between the debate period and the after-period. In particular, the sorts of Twitter activities that would suggest users are allocating their attention to objects outside the television broadcast (by using links or @-mentions) are notably low during the debate, and rise afterwards. Furthermore, in both countries most categories of users engage in slightly more retweeting in the 'after' period, perhaps indicating that with the debate over they are looking more at Twitter to see how others responded. The notable exception is pundits in both countries, who engaged is substantially more retweeting during the debate than after; it may be that this set of users was more actively following Twitter during the debate, and afterwards turned to crafting their own messages. And while party handles in France followed the general trend of retweeting more often in the post-debate period, we did not pick up a single instance of a party handle in the United States posting a retweet in the after-period.

Spurring Twitter activity

Tables 3 and 4 examine the impact of this elite activity on overall volume of Twitter comments about the debate. Each table presents two separate regressions, with the dependent variables being the count of tweets mentioning a given candidate during each time interval during the debate; counts were normalized relative to the number of seconds in the time interval. Table 3 takes up the American case, exploring mentions of Obama and Romney; Table 4 concerns the French, analyzing mentions of Hollande and Sarkozy. In each case, elements from within the debate itself (that is, the generation of memes and the visual features) are entered as controls in Model 1 (see Shah *et al*, 2015 for details). Our variables of interest are added in Model 2, and consist of elite actors' activity in the Twitter discussion, as measured by retweets of their messages.

There is remarkable consistency across all four models. In every case, the addition of our key independent variables makes a significant and substantial contribution to the model fit. In every case *F*-test scores are significant, and the changes in R^2 are large: in the French case they double (Sarkozy) or nearly so (Hollande). In the American case they rise from already respectable levels still higher. It is thus clear that elites' behavior on social media is making a discernable impact on the amount of public tweeting about the candidates during the debates, confirming Hypothesis 1. And it is not the case that elites are simply responding to the same stimuli as members of the public at large: the *F*-test scores of the control block of variable hardly change with the introduction of our elite activity measures, and total R^2 rise, indicating that the effects are not explained by mediation.

Moreover, the particular effects described by the models are very similar. Every model shows the Twitter activity of party-related handles to be significantly associated with mentions of candidates in the debates. And in every case except the

Table 3: Generalized least squares (Prais–Winsten) regressions predicting normalized volume of mentions of Obama and Romney during the first American debate

Variables	*(1)Obama*	*(2)Obama*	*(1)Romney*	*(2)Romney*
Obama Meme	37.07***	35.51***	2.882	1.204
	(4.445)	(4.374)	(5.659)	(5.679)
Romney Meme	−7.832**	−3.780	−16.70***	−12.44***
	(3.057)	(3.027)	(3.892)	(3.931)
Obama Tone-Angry/Threat	−0.286	0.0483	−2.818**	−2.546**
	(0.942)	(0.910)	(1.199)	(1.182)
Obama Tone-Happy/Reassuring	0.0890	0.550	−2.642**	−2.106*
	(0.952)	(0.916)	(1.212)	(1.190)
Romney Tone-Angry/Threat	−0.746	−0.831	−1.952	−2.030
	(1.132)	(1.079)	(1.441)	(1.401)
Romney Tone-Happy/Reassuring	−1.555	−1.147	−0.517	−0.114
	(1.163)	(1.115)	(1.481)	(1.448)
Obama Facial-Angry/Threat	1.408*	0.871	1.777*	1.209
	(0.827)	(0.802)	(1.053)	(1.041)
Obama Affinity Gesture	−1.857	−1.737	−0.655	−0.419
	(1.724)	(1.656)	(2.195)	(2.152)
Obama Defiance Gesture	−0.609	−0.869	−0.742	−1.035
	(1.051)	(1.024)	(1.338)	(1.330)
Romney Facial-Angry/Threat	2.043	1.686	0.262	−0.0917
	(1.431)	(1.365)	(1.823)	(1.774)
Romney Affinity Gesture	1.256	0.962	2.002	1.687
	(1.074)	(1.026)	(1.367)	(1.333)
Romney Defiance Gesture	−0.705	−0.576	0.910	0.961
	(1.162)	(1.115)	(1.479)	(1.448)
Retweets: Advocacy Group	—	−0.00655	—	−0.0525
		(0.101)		(0.131)
Retweets: Celebrities	—	−0.150	—	−0.146
		(0.516)		(0.670)
Retweets: Media	—	0.0693	—	0.0693
		(0.0483)		(0.0627)
Retweets: Party	—	0.111***	—	0.129**
		(0.0402)		(0.0523)
Retweets: Pundit	—	0.0956***	—	0.0963**
		(0.0329)		(0.0428)
Constant	52.69***	47.17***	44.77	38.55
	(14.83)	(11.31)	(28.21)	(24.08)
F-test: Controls	7.82***	6.78***	3.00***	1.88**
F-test: Retweets	—	4.73***	—	3.13**
LR test	—	24.00***	—	16.53***
Observations	169	169	169	169
R^2	0.371	0.452	0.181	0.256

*$P<0.1$, **$P<0.05$, ***$P<0.01$.
Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4: Generalized least squares (Prais–Winsten) regressions predicting normalized volume of mentions of Hollande and Sarkozy during the French debate

Variables	*(1)Hollande volume*	*(2)Hollande volume*	*(1)Sarkozy volume*	*(2)Sarkozy volume*
Hollande Tone-Angry/Threat	0.164*	0.163*	0.0236	0.0173
	(0.0916)	(0.0904)	(0.0724)	(0.0700)
Hollande Tone-Happy/Reassuring	–0.0161	0.102	–0.636**	–0.490*
	(0.349)	(0.345)	(0.269)	(0.263)
Sarkozy Tone-Angry/Threat	0.162*	0.165*	0.175**	0.166**
	(0.0891)	(0.0882)	(0.0700)	(0.0681)
Sarkozy Tone-Happy/Reassuring	–0.195	–0.155	0.0829	0.115
	(0.146)	(0.145)	(0.117)	(0.113)
Hollande Facial-Angry/Threat	–0.151	–0.122	0.0359	0.0575
	(0.0953)	(0.0943)	(0.0754)	(0.0731)
Hollande Facial-Happy/Reassuring	0.0838	0.0640	0.402**	0.370**
	(0.226)	(0.224)	(0.181)	(0.175)
Hollande Affinity Gesture	–0.0145	–0.00689	0.00847	0.0148
	(0.104)	(0.102)	(0.0827)	(0.0799)
Hollande Defiance Gesture	–0.0246	–0.0352	–0.0729	–0.0859
	(0.0698)	(0.0697)	(0.0557)	(0.0544)
Sarkozy Facial-Angry/Threat	–0.0939	–0.0764	–0.00770	0.0101
	(0.0926)	(0.0928)	(0.0734)	(0.0721)
Sarkozy Facial-Happy/Reassuring	0.279***	0.280***	0.114	0.119
	(0.0979)	(0.0971)	(0.0782)	(0.0759)
Sarkozy Affinity Gesture	–0.104	–0.125	–0.154**	–0.176**
	(0.0982)	(0.0973)	(0.0777)	(0.0755)
Sarkozy Defiance Gesture	–0.132*	–0.139*	–0.102*	–0.110*
	(0.0748)	(0.0738)	(0.0594)	(0.0575)
Hollande Meme	0.301	0.0969	0.261	0.112
	(0.353)	(0.354)	(0.283)	(0.277)
Sarkozy Meme	–0.0809	–0.178	0.128	0.0382
	(0.210)	(0.211)	(0.167)	(0.165)
Retweets: Celebrities	—	–0.185	—	–0.226**
		(0.113)		(0.0883)
Retweets: Media	—	0.00907	—	0.0153
		(0.0135)		(0.0104)
Retweets: Party	—	0.0210***	—	0.0159***
		(0.00624)		(0.00484)
Retweets: Pundit	—	0.0149	—	0.0217**
		(0.0118)		(0.00908)
Constant	3.682***	3.311***	2.761***	2.419***
	(0.162)	(0.187)	(0.104)	(0.128)
F-test: Controls	1.50	1.47	1.74**	1.77**
F-test: Retweets	—	3.88***	—	6.11***
LR Test	—	16.01***	—	24.98***
Observations	337	337	337	337
R^2	0.065	0.108	0.056	0.124

*$P<0.1$, **$P<0.05$, ***$P<0.01$.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

model predicting mentions of Hollande, pundits' activity makes a significant contribution. Equally important, in no case does the activity of journalistic (media) handles significantly impact candidate mentions, nor does the activity of advocacy handles (note that no advocacy group tweeted, or were retweeted, during the French debate, and thus do not appear in Table 4). The one significant effect concerning celebrities occurs in the model predicting mentions of Sarkozy; there, the direction is negative, suggesting that retweets of celebrities were associated with falling mentions of Sarkozy, perhaps because attention was being drawn away from the debate. (Though no French celebrity tweeted during the debate, we did identify a handful of retweets of their previous messages.)[2]

Attracting retweets

To investigate Research Question 2, we calculated the number of times the posts of every handle that appeared in our data set were retweeted, and identified the 50 most-retweeted individuals for each debate; we then classified the highly retweeted individuals according to what sort of user they are. To do this, we first used our existing classification scheme to classify highly tweeted users who were on our original lists. We then sorted the other handles into one of those categories and combined some categories for parsimony. This yielded classifications of political figures (including candidates and parties), media figures (journalists and pundits), celebrities and citizens with no discernable claim to fame. In the process, following Freelon and Karpf (2015), we found it necessary to add two additional categories: digital personalities who have become famous for their work or media in an entirely online setting (for example, YouTube phenom Tyler Oakley) and accounts operated as parody accounts (for instance, after Romney proposed cutting funding to PBS, several accounts in the person of Big Bird appeared), fan accounts or accounts simply trying to attract followers.

Table 5: Categorization of 50 most-retweeted handles during and after-periods of US and French debates

	US		*France*	
	During (%)	*After (%)*	*During (%)*	*After (%)*
Political	16	14	36	38
Media	42	34	38	34
Celebrity	10	8	16	8
Digital personality	6	4	4	6
Citizen	4	6	2	2
Joke/parody/follow	16	28	4	6
Suspended/unknown	6	6	0	6

Table 5 breaks down the set of 50 most-retweeted handles (accounts), during and after each debate. In France, the pattern is unmistakable: political and media elites dominate the set of most-retweeted accounts, combining to together make up 76 per cent of those during the debate, and 72 per cent in the after-period. Celebrities make up another 16 and 8 per cent; handles that could be considered non-elite in any sense make up only a small portion.

The story in the United States is more interesting. First, political elites make up a smaller (though still sizable) portion of the most-retweeted: only 16 per cent during the debate and 14 per cent after. Media figures play an even stronger role. Celebrities, digital personalities and average citizens are sparsely represented, but what is notable is the set of joke/parody/follow accounts, which make up 16 per cent of the most-retweeted accounts during the debate and fully 28 per cent after. Thus, whereas we had noted that Freelon and Karpf's (2015) similar finding had been based on an analysis of tweets about specific debate moments, when we take a broader view, we find such humorous and parody accounts continue to be prominently represented in terms of retweets throughout the debate (and even more so after).

Discussion

Our evidence attests to the continuing significance of the broadcast political event, even in the face of fragmentation of media and audience attention (Jungherr, 2014; Lin *et al*, 2014). But the broadcast 'first screen' no longer stands alone: it is now joined by a host of 'second screens' that allow users not only to respond to what happens on television, but also to see and interact with others' social media messages about it. (Vaccari *et al* (2015) point out that some social media users never actually tune in to the 'first screen' during major political events, but only encounter it via others' posts.) We thus investigated to what extent the public's attention – as measured by its tweeting activity – can be explained by content reaching arriving via that second screen, and specifically, messages from political and media elites.

And we found that it can be: most of all, our data validate the sense of parties and campaigns that social media is a channel with which to reach the public during a media event (Kreiss, 2014). In nearly every case, the Twitter activity of party handles and pundits significantly predicted public discussion of the candidates in the debate. Somewhat surprisingly, the activity of media handles had no comparable effect. These findings substantiate our hypothesis that the 'spin room' has moved into real time, and onto social media: it is clear that the contestation of political meaning is taking place in real time, all of the time and in interaction with social media.

Critical to studies of the hybrid media system is the question of who plays the largest role in defining that meaning. A perennial question in studies of digital media is the extent to which new media develop spaces of discussion relatively more free of the control of elites (for example, Castells, 2009). While we know that many

Twitter users were quite focused on the debates, and social media enabled them to 'speak back' to the broadcast messages, in often unpredictable, creative forms (Freelon and Karpf, 2015), our finding of real-time spin also suggests there is an ironic sense in which social media have enabled elite communicators to invade – to colonize – one of the rare, few domains in which they did not already have powerful sway. We have cited media events' unique ability to interrupt the typical flow of everyday life and everyday media – to run for a brief 90–180 min without the incessant chattering of pundits and journalists. For citizens engaging media events with a second screen, that has come to an end. If Dayan and Katz (1992) could imagine a social scene in a private space such as a living room, second screens have invited in commentators as though they are sitting on the couch next to us. In fact, in an age of 'alone togetherness' (Turkle, 2012), is it possible some viewers are even more 'with' the personalities of the media sphere than in their own social space? This question demands further attention.

A qualification of this characterization of our findings is in order. Though we did identify consistent 'significant' effects of elite figures' tweets (or more precisely, retweets of those tweets), the explanatory power of our models indicated that our measures of elite activity typically accounted for just under 10 per cent of the variance in the dependent variables. (In France, our key variables accounted for less variance in absolute terms, but because the models were relatively less well fit than those of the American case, a larger proportion of total variance explained.) Thus, though we found that Twitter activity about the debates is influenced by elite message-sending, that influence is far from deterministic: there is a lot of Twitter activity about the debates not related to the elite behavior examined here. In a hybrid media system, it should be no surprise that elite contributions are but one of many spurs of activity.

Divergent social media cultures?

Our analysis of the most-retweeted individuals during and after the debates builds on this general finding, though the differences between the two countries have become evident. In France, the most-retweeted handles were political elites, with media elites trailing close behind; other actors were almost non-existent – consistent with a story of elite dominance of French political communications and the results of Table 3. In the United States, the finding that political and media elites were highly retweeted also parallels our regression findings (Hawthorne *et al*, 2013). But the pattern of retweeting in the United States raises two important points: first, though the activity of journalistic media accounts was not a significant spur of activity during the debate (per Table 3), journalists made up a sizable portion of the most-retweeted handles.[3]

Second, the much greater prominence of humor and parody accounts in the United States may indicate the presence of a Twitter culture that does not have a parallel in France. Freelon and Karpf (2015; see also Driscoll *et al*, 2013) highlight

these accounts as evidence that average citizens can gain a voice on Twitter. It is interesting that when they do so, it takes this particular ironic, humorous, meme-ified form: it is the expression of a powerful strain of Internet culture that revels in the rapid, real-time creation of shareable memes often made of quotes, mashups and revealing contrasts (Jenkins, 2006). Moreover, the rise in the relative retweeting of joke accounts in the period following the US debate may indicate the continuing conversation of 'hard core' Twitter users – those who have turned their attention to other matters but continue to follow the ideas coming out of accounts established during the debate.

No such digital culture was apparent in the French case, where elites dominate the lists of most-retweeted. This finding conforms to the generally held view that the French Twitter universe is highly elite dominated – and of French political communication more generally as a 'closed shop' of Paris-based political junkies (Riutort, 2007) not very open to a widening of citizen participation (Maarek, 2009). Whether such a culture takes another form that does not take an interest in presidential debates – or that our particular analytic strategy missed – should be investigated.

We should also, of course, interrogate the generally optimistic, democratizing interpretation of the prominence of such accounts in the United States. It is notable, for instance, that so much of the highly retweeted humor is originating with new accounts, not typical citizens' accounts, and that they typically serve no further purpose after the debate (Lin *et al*, 2014). While irony and humor are indeed styles that make it safe to engage in political discourse in a cynical society – probably especially so on Twitter – it is not clear how much this can even be considered a political discourse. It may have political content, but its primary intent appears to be, for all intents and purposes, to gain followers: 'jokes appear to have significant currency as a means of boosting one's visibility on Twitter' (Driscoll *et al*, 2013).

Coproducing or coopting?

One of our orienting questions for this study concerned how the new media environment has changed how political meaning was created and contested. What we have found is that the answer is not a clear one: citizens do now contribute to a stream of political communication that is public, and closely monitored by journalists and others. And citizens sometimes attract substantial attention, especially (in the American case) through the peculiar medium of parody and satire. At the same time, the addition of social media to the debate moment has by no means removed political and media elites from the scene (Margolis and Resnick, 2000; cf. Hindman, 2009). Campaign strategists now reach citizens in real time, with no mediation of journalists (Bennett and Manheim, 2006), and their commentary appears to indeed attract attention and activity on the part of the political Twitterverse. The spin room may be quiet after the debate – a period that may now be the provenance of Twitter humorists and wits – but it is alive and well during it, now in real time.

Limitations

The study presented here has several limitations that we should acknowledge in the interest of contextualizing our findings and improving research in this emergent area. One choice we made was to pre-select political and media elites on the basis of their prominence in Twitter during the 2012 campaigns. This contributed face validity in the sense that we selected exactly those handles most associated with prominent Twitter activity, and allowed us to create meaningful categories of elite users. At the same time, this technique made it feasible to identify only a limited number of these (300 in each country), and of course, a few of these chose not to participate on Twitter during our key periods of interest. This obstacle can be overcome by techniques that define elites on the basis of a metric such as follower count (Lin *et al*, 2014) or 'verified status', but these tend not to be able to well specify what *kinds* of users these 'elites' are.

The limited list of elites, combined with the need to enter variables with meaningful variation into our models also led us not to use the tweets of elites directly, but instead retweets of their messages. We believe this is a defensible choice based on the fact that many individuals will encounter messages not from elites directly but through those retweets (a process of imitation; Tarde, 1903; Lazarsfeld *et al*, 1948; Wu *et al*, 2011; Shah *et al*, 2015), but nonetheless it would have been preferable to more directly measure the impacts of elites' tweets.

Along those same lines, it is certain that Twitter users are not only responding to televised images and elites' messages on Twitter, they surely also tweet in response to their friend networks. Future research should devise a way to account for this; the question of elites' roles during debates especially calls for comparing the relative effects of different elements within a given Twitter user's personal communication network.

And finally, though our criterion variable of Twitter activity about the debate contestants was an obvious choice, it should not pass as unproblematic. We have tended to conflate aggregate user activity (tweeting) with media effect, arguing that it represents moments of some kind reaction or arousal. But in fact, of course, the act of tweeting and being affected by a media moment are not the same thing, and research considering the relationship is greatly needed as more and more work is done in the area.

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Notes

1 For the information included in each Twitter object, see dev.twitter.com/docs/platform-objects.
2 We also ran models using lagged measures of our dependent variables (see Shah *et al*, forthcoming); these models performed significantly less well than those presented here, perhaps indicating the rapid die-off of the effects described.
3 It is possible that this is partly an artifact of our analytic technique: because we used retweets of handles as the measure of their activity in our independent variables, we had to remove them from the dependent variable. It is therefore possible that a highly retweeted category of user might not appear to predict general user activity – if many people retweeted those users *but did not otherwise engage with them or the ideas they posted*. That is, users may be more likely to reply to a pundit or party handle – in which case their response would occur in our data set. Future research might explore how users respond and interact differently to these different sorts of elite actors during debates.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Elite handles selected for American case, by category

Advocacy groups (48)	*Party (67)*	*Celebrities (5)*	*Media (97)*	*Pundits (83)*
@abaesq	@agstevebullock	@ehasselbeck	@abc	@aburnspolitico
@aclu	@allenwest	@garysinise	@abcfactcheck	@anamariecox
@acuconservative	@askgeorge	@johncusack	@AJEnglish	@andrewbreitbart
@aei	@barackobama	@MiaFarrow	@andersoncooper	@andylevy
@aflcio	@berkley4senate	@rosie	@anncurry	@anncoulter
@afphq	@bobmcdonnell	—	@bbcworld	@ariannahuff
@americanxroads	@dennyrehberg	—	@bloomberg	@benpolitico
@amprog	@devinnunes	—	@bostonglobe	@billmaher
@brookingsinst	@dwstweets	—	@bretbaier	@borowitzreport
@catoinstitute	@elizabethforma	—	@brianstelter	@ByronYork
@charteralliance	@ericcantor	—	@BuzzFeed	@CharlesMunn1
@citizens_united	@george_lemieux	—	@BuzzFeedBen	@danbalz
@club4growth	@georgeallenva	—	@cbsnews	@daveweigel
@commoncause	@GOP	—	@chucktodd	@david_gergen
@familiesusa	@GovChrisitie	—	@cjr	@davidaxelrod
@farmbureau	@govchristie	—	@cnetnews	@DavidLimbaugh
@focusfamily	@governoromalley	—	@cnn	@donnabrazile
@freedomtomarry	@governorperry	—	@CNNPolitics	@drudge_report
@freedomworks	@GovWalker	—	@current	@eugene_robinson
@hcan	@heather4senate	—	@DailyCaller	@ewerickson
@hrc	@heinrich4nm	—	@davidgregory	@exposeliberals
@moveon	@jayinslee	—	@edshow	@ezraklein
@naral	@JoeBiden	—	@enews	@fivethirtyeight
@nationalcorn	@johnboehner	—	@ethanklapper	@foxnation
@neatoday	@johncornyn	—	@factcheckdotorg	@ggreenwald
@nfib	@jonbruning	—	@FAIRmediawatch	@glennbeck
@nomtweets	@jonhuntsman	—	@FoxNews	@govmikehuckabee
@nrdc	@judybiggert	—	@gallupnews	@jbouie
@nrlc	@kevincoughlin	—	@GlennKesslerWP	@jjauthor
@occupywallst	@kevinomccarthy	—	@gstephanopoulos	@jmartpolitico
@peoplefor	@leeterry2012	—	@guardiannews	@joenbc
@ppact	@leonardboswell	—	@HuffingtonPost	@johnfugelsang
@public_citizen	@maloneyforwv	—	@HuffPostPol	@jonahnro
@publichealth	@mazieforhawaii	—	@jaketapper	@JONWEXFORD
@sbalist	@maziehirono	—	@jdickerson	@joshtpm
@seiu	@michelebachmann	—	@jeffjarvis	@karlrove
@sierra_club	@MichelleObama	—	@jimcramer	@KatyinIndy
@taxreformer	@mittromney	—	@kasie	@keitholbermann
@tppatriots	@nancypelosi	—	@latimes	@KOSMOSNET
@uschamber	@newtgingrich	—	@LATimesbiz	@krauthammer
@OccupyWallStNYC	@Obama2012	—	@latinopolitics	@LarrySabato
@TeaPartyExpress	@ovide2012	—	@markknoller	@LeslieMarshall

Table A1: (*Continued*)

Advocacy groups (48)	*Party (67)*	*Celebrities (5)*	*Media (97)*	*Pundits (83)*
@TeaPartyOrg	@patmccrorync	—	@mattbai	@limbaugh
@thegrio	@pattymurray	—	@mediaite	@lolgop
@grist	@petesessions	—	@megynkelly	@Love0fFreedom
@WashingtonDCTea	@reincepriebus	—	@mehdirhasan	@maddow
@Heritage	@repberkley	—	@michele_norris	@markos
@thinkprogress	@repgosar	—	@mmfa	@mattyglesias
—	@repgregwalden	—	@msnbc	@mckaycoppins
—	@repjimmatheson	—	@MysteryPollster	@MelissaTweets
—	@repjohnlarson	—	@nationaljourna	@michaelemlong
—	@repkinzinger	—	@NBCNews	@michellemalkin
—	@repmikemcintyre	—	@newsbusters	@Miller51550
—	@repsteveisrael	—	@newshour	@mollyesque
—	@ricksantorum	—	@Newsupdate_25	@morocca
—	@robmckenna	—	@nickconfessore	@newsbusters
—	@ronpaul	—	@nprnews	@nickkristof
—	@RyanGOP	—	@NYTimes	@nytimesdowd
—	@senatorreid	—	@onthemedia	@nytimesfriedman
—	@senjonkyl	—	@OpenSecretsDC	@nytimeskrugman
—	@SenRonJohnson	—	@Politico	@OBAMA_GAMES
—	@tammybaldwinwi	—	@politifact	@peggynoonannyc
—	@thedemocrats	—	@postpolitics	@Politics_PR
—	@timkaine	—	@postpolls	@PositiveEnerG
—	@toddakin	—	@Poynter	@ron_fournier
—	@whiphoyer	—	@PranayGupte	@RyanLizza
—	@whitehouse	—	@radiobabe	@sarahpalinusa
—	—	—	@ralstonflash	@seanhannity
—	—	—	@RasmussenPoll	@stefcutter
—	—	—	@reuters	@stephenathome
—	—	—	@RollCall	@StevenErtelt
—	—	—	@Slate	@sullydish
—	—	—	@snopes	@The_News_DIVA
—	—	—	@soledad_obrien	@thedailyshow
—	—	—	@streetkode	@theharryshearer
—	—	—	@sunfoundation	@theonion
—	—	—	@terrymoran	@ThePlumLineGS
—	—	—	@TheAtlantic	@tjholthaus
—	—	—	@thecaucus	@TPO_Hisself
—	—	—	@TheDailyBeast	@tweetAmiracle
—	—	—	@theeconomist	@USRealityCheck
—	—	—	@thefix	@wegoted
—	—	—	@thehill	@zennie62
—	—	—	@TIME	—
—	—	—	@TPM	—
—	—	—	@tw_top_politics	—
—	—	—	@TWCBreaking	—
—	—	—	@UnivisionNews	—

Table A1: (*Continued*)

Advocacy groups (48)	*Party (67)*	*Celebrities (5)*	*Media (97)*	*Pundits (83)*
—	—	—	@usatoday	—
—	—	—	@usnews	—
—	—	—	@washingtonpost	—
—	—	—	@weeklystandard	—
—	—	—	@WestWingReport	—
—	—	—	@wolfblitzercnn	—
—	—	—	@wsj	—
—	—	—	@wsjwashington	—
—	—	—	@yahoonews	—

Note: Total number of handles in each category are shown in parentheses next to the category header.

Appendix B

Table B1: Elite handles selected for French case, by category

Advocacy groups (25)	*Celebrities (11)*	*Media (114)*	*Party and government (88)*	*Pundits (62)*
@allianceVITA	@Maitre_Eolas	@FRANCE24	@Elysee	@Bravepatrie
@amnestyfrance	@TomDeNimes	@lemondefr	@francediplo	@Sylvain_Quimene
@attac_fr	@MartinParent_	@20Minutes	@Senat_Info	@stanislaskazal
@cfdt	@mbaladieudo	@LEXPRESS	@Place_Beauvau	@Votre_Pere
@cgtsiteinternet	@valtrier	@libe	@fil_gouv	@Ragoemaere
@CNBarreaux	@carlabruni	@Le_Figaro	@Bordeaux	@le_gorafi
@force_ouvriere	@stephaneguillon	@mediapart	@Toulouse	@morandiniblog
@medef	@ruquierofficiel	@Rue89	@Senat_Direct	@NicolasBedos1
@SOS_racisme	@farrugiadom	@BFMTV	@nantesfr	@dannycohnbendit
@SOShomophobie	@arnoklarsfeld	@franceinter	@Strategie_Gouv	@michelonfray
@USM_magistrats	@debbouzejamel	@LeNouvelObs	@prefpolice	@corinnelepage
@caritasfrance	—	@le_Parisien	@fhollande	@chevenement
@CNRS	—	@Afpfr	@nicolassarkozy	@DarmonMichael
@EetR_National	—	@Franceinfo	@MLP_officiel	@GG_RMC
@Femen_France	—	@RTLFrance	@Bayrou	@Eberretta
@Inter_LGBT	—	@Cchaffanjon	@JLMelenchon	@DominiqueReynie
@Yagg	—	@Europe1	@Jcheminade	@AlexHervaud
@LaManifPourTous	—	@France24_fr	@EvaJoly	@aurelherbemont
@laquadrature	—	@JJbourdin_RMC	@PhilipePoutou	@Tariqkrim
@Mlpresident	—	@Slatefr	@Dupontaignan	@pierresalviac
@NonAuSocialisme	—	@ARTEfr	@Cheminade2012	@StevenJambot
@oxfamfrance	—	@Mariann2fr	@Nathaliearthaud	@LS_Tatihou
@UNEF	—	@ParisMatch	@Alainjuppe	@martin76130
@WWFFrance	—	@LaurenceFerrari	@Bcazeneuve	@carolinedehaas
@Le_CRIF	—	@jmaphatie	@benoithamon	@MsieurLapique
—	—	@LesEchos	@Bruno_LeMaire	@GuillaumeTC
—	—	@Michelmn_pol	@BrunoLeRoux	@pascalcardonna
—	—	@LeHuffPost	@CecileDuflot	@pierrejovanovic

Table B1: (*Continued*)

Advocacy groups (25)	*Celebrities (11)*	*Media (114)*	*Party and government (88)*	*Pundits (62)*
—	—	@RFI	@datirachida	@WendyBouchard
—	—	@itele	@desarnez	@claudeposternak
—	—	@pierrehaski	@f_philippot	@FerryLuc
—	—	@LePoint	@Fdelapierre	@E_Dupin
—	—	@bernstephane	@Flefebvre_UMP	@OnZeLeft
—	—	@MYTF1News	@franck_louvrier	@jack_lang
—	—	@TV5MONDE	@FrancoisFillon	@AlainMinc
—	—	@franceculture	@frebsamen	@nicolasbeytout
—	—	@ELLEfrance	@geoffroydidier	@Josebove
—	—	@Wilfrid_Esteve	@laurossignol	@LaurenceParisot
—	—	@courrierinter	@GillesBoyer	@blogzemmour
—	—	@SophiaAram	@Herve_Morin	@Leasalame
—	—	@publicsenat	@jccambadelis	@audreypulvar
—	—	@aslapix	@jeanmarcayrault	@antoinedecaunes
—	—	@Challenges	@jf_cope	@Michel_denisot
—	—	@quatremer	@jpraffarin	@Finkielkraut
—	—	@samuellaurent	@julienbayou	@Bhl
—	—	@RTBFinfo	@LaurentFabius	@zemmourinfos
—	—	@francetvinfo	@manuelvalls	@SergeMoati
—	—	@lavoixdunord	@MartineAubry	@Arretsurimages
—	—	@RFIAfrique	@louis_aliot	@IfopOpinion
—	—	@LCPan	@montebourg	@FogielMarcO
—	—	@leLab_E1	@Michel_morano	@Francoislenglet
—	—	@atlantico_fr	@najatvb	@AlainDuhamel
—	—	@JeudyBruno	@olbesancenot	@LaurentMauduit
—	—	@RMCinfo	@RoyalSegolene	@pascalriche
—	—	@ThomasWieder	@SleFoll	@AuroreGorius
—	—	@Laurent_Joffrin	@valeriomotta	@ndemorand
—	—	@magnac3	@vpecresse	@lofejoma
—	—	@lalibrebe	@Marion_M_Le_Pen	@JFAchilli
—	—	@valeurs	@n_km	@ydekerdrel
—	—	@LCI	@Claudebartolone	@NathalieSchuck
—	—	@egaucher	@RoxaneDecorte	@edwyplenel
—	—	@B_Roger_Petit	@Chantal_Jouanno	@C_barbier
—	—	@nextinpact	@Eciotti	—
—	—	@MryEmery	@JeanLucRomero	—
—	—	@AlexLemarie	@Yvesjego	—
—	—	@Midilibre	@Dassouline	—
—	—	@Nice_Matin	@GilbertCollard	—
—	—	@MediapartLive	@DebordValerie	—
—	—	@Lopinion_fr	@Mlebranchu	—
—	—	@confidentiels	@Cgirard	—
—	—	@MotsCroises	@Jcgaudin	—
—	—	@GillesKLEIN	@villepin	—
—	—	@francebleu	@ericwoerth	—
—	—	@Gtabard	@r_bachelot	—
—	—	@bastienhugues	@ump	—
—	—	@leplus_obs	@partisocialiste	—
—	—	@France	@FN_officiel	—
—	—	@fgerschel	@MoDem	—
—	—	@dnatweets	@EELV	—

Table B1: (*Continued*)

Advocacy groups (25)	*Celebrities (11)*	*Media (114)*	*Party and government (88)*	*Pundits (62)*
—	—	@TVMAG	@LePG	—
—	—	@bruce_toussaint	@CNPCF	—
—	—	@marineturchi	@NPA2009	—
—	—	@gchampeau	@DLF_officiel	—
—	—	@vnataf	@Fdg	—
—	—	@BrunoMasure	@SetP_officiel	—
—	—	@ivanrioufol	@LutteOuvrier	—
—	—	@TV5MONDEINFO	@PaulLarrouturou	—
—	—	@RTSinfo	@JLBorloo	—
—	—	@patthomas	—	—
—	—	@infos140	—	—
—	—	@rosselin	—	—
—	—	@GuillaumeDaret	—	—
—	—	@Alkanz	—	—
—	—	@Livredelire	—	—
—	—	@florencedesruol	—	—
—	—	@sebastienfolin	—	—
—	—	@MMaestracci	—	—
—	—	@SO_Bordeaux	—	—
—	—	@NewsEnContinu	—	—
—	—	@DanielGGirard	—	—
—	—	@renaudpila	—	—
—	—	@tatianaderosnay	—	—
—	—	@lemondelive	—	—
—	—	@Linformatrice	—	—
—	—	@davidpujadas	—	—
—	—	@l_peillon	—	—
—	—	@LeMondeEcoEnt	—	—
—	—	@LaCroixCom	—	—
—	—	@ArLeparmentier	—	—
—	—	@PPDA	—	—
—	—	@CNNFrancePR	—	—
—	—	@CNNi	—	—
—	—	@Beaudonnet	—	—
—	—	@FredPaya	—	—

Note: Total number of handles in each category are shown in parentheses next to the category header.