*Article*

# Hands Up, Don't Shoot, Whose Side Are You On? Journalists Tweeting the Ferguson Protests

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**Abstract**

This article represents a qualitative analysis of the Twitter feed from one news organization during the first phase of protests in Ferguson, Missouri, after the shooting of Michael Brown in 2014. The tweets, images, and videos from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* journalists constitute a real-time record as the protests unfolded. By applying a strand of framing theory known as the protest paradigm, the analysis discovered that journalists' tweeting marganalized protesters and framed police officers as dispassionate protectors of social order. Journalists' tweeting of protesters took on a more sympthatic tone when they both were subjected to police tear gas.These findings have implications for the coverage of race, violence, and protests in the United States as well as the way Twitter binds and represents an interpretive community.

**Keywords**

Twitter, journalist, protest paradigm, social movements, framing

## Introduction

On August 9, 2014, during a hot summer afternoon in a suburb outside of St. Louis, Missouri, a police officer shot an unarmed young Black man under controversial circumstances ("Tracking the Events," 2014). For residents of this lower-income neighborhood, the shooting, insensitive treatment of the body, and the response of police ignited a fire storm. The slow, low steam of residential anger erupted into violence, first at a convenience store, then on the streets. What happened after that became the subject of international news coverage and a somewhat rare event in the United States when journalists were affected by riot-enforcement tear gas and a few were arrested as they exercised their constitutional right to report the news.

Throughout the events, journalists utilized Twitter to inform their audience of events unfolding on the streets of Ferguson. Journalists' tweets included images and short video clips that helped them connect the audience to violence on the ground. As a result, the tweets from the Ferguson protest offer a unique opportunity to study how a story develops in real time. This project takes advantage of Twitter's unique attributes to explore the way the protests of Ferguson were covered when journalists became part of the story, and not just the storyteller.

Located close to Ferguson, Missouri, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was the first major newspaper to report on the incident and community reaction from the start . Its online coverage of the protests was awarded an EPPY in 2014 for Best Use of Photography. To report the events from the streets, the newspaper used not only general assignment reporters but also journalists from more specialized beats, such as public safety, politics, and columnists.

Not only professional journalists were reporting at the scene. The protests in Ferguson were also reported on Twitter by citizen journalists, activists, and others concerned with the events, including an alderman who owns a website that uses videos to document political activities and the government, and who has more followers on Twitter than the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* twitter account and its staff who covered the protests combined.

## Theoretical Foundation

The events in Ferguson in 2014 raise numerous issues of concern to communication scholars, including the media framing of social protest, digital media's impact on news practices, and the blurring of professional boundaries for journalism. The rise of social media promotes a shift in the traditional process of making news. Mainstream journalists who microblog tend to discuss their work patterns, which

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could increase accountability and transparency among news consumers, and are more likely to express their opinions—a practice which contradicts journalistic norms of objectivity (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). Recent studies have been focusing on the ethic of transparency and analyzing in which extent it overlaps or clashes with principles that for more than a century ruled the professional ideology ( Helmueller, Vos, & Poepsel, 2013; Lasorsa, 2012; Singer, 2007, 2010).

Three strands of theory can help understand the way Twitter was used by journalists in their coverage of the protest and their own role in that coverage: Zelizer's (1993) conceptualization of journalism as an interpretive community, the framing approach to analyzing media content, and the protest paradigm.

## *Journalism as an Interpretive Community*

Zelizer (1993) argued that viewing journalists as merely a professional community, which carries the concepts of training, technical skills, codes of conduct, and organization in itself, is not enough to classify and understand the American journalists. Due to the nature of news, journalists have the opportunity to report the news as it happens *and* to later interpret those events and re-construct their meaning. She defined an interpretive community as "united through its shared discourse and collective interpretations of public events" (p. 219).

Brüggeman and Engesser (2013) found climate journalists use discourse to distinguish themselves as specialists. Robinson and DeShano (2011) used the interpretive community frame to identify a clash between bloggers and local reporters in the American Midwest. Especially when it comes to war and conflict journalism, level of this authority significantly increases, as "war possesses a key place in the collective memory of a nation"(Carlson, 2006).

Mourão's (2015) study of reportorial tweeting found that journalists used humor as a professional binding agent on social media. Humor is often an effective way to establish social boundaries, because "getting" the joke requires group membership. Twitter enables the sort of journalist-to-journalist discourse that establishes the discursive community.

## *Framing and Visual Framing*

The framing paradigm is useful for its application of rhetorical analysis to media messages in a way that identifies the *means* by which ideology is reproduced. The framing "program," as Reese (2007) calls it, is rooted in the sociological work of Erving Goffman (1986) and the linguistic/philosophical writings of Gregory Bateson (1972). The metaphor of the "frame" provides rich ground for analyses of media that do more than look for "bias," but explain how the choices of media creators reflect a particular worldview (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Gamson, 2003). As Entman (1993) put it, to frame is to

> *. . . select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. (p. 52, emphasis in original)

Gitlin's (1980) and other seminal framing studies (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Tuchman, 1978) included visuals as part of the "selected aspects" of a reality to identify media ideology. Visual framing analysis has taken on a life of its own as images have become central to studies that examine the larger messages conveyed by patterns of image use (Fahmy, 2010; Fahmy, Kelly, & Kim, 2007; Fahmy & Neumann, 2012; Reynolds & Barnett, 2003; Schwalbe, Silcock, & Keith, 2008). These studies use what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) call multi-modal discourse analysis in that, to varying degrees, they examine the way images are used in larger media patterns.

Visual information poses special problems for scholarly analysis: it cannot be subject to computer text analysis, it is multi-dimensional and not easily coded for content analysis, and its meaning is largely contingent. As Messaris (1997) noted, images can be used to say things that might not be appropriately articulated in words. Research also indicates that the audience processes images differently than language, in ways that are faster, more emotional, and more instinctive. For these reasons, in spite of their methodological challenges, images represent an important source of information for framing analysis.

## *Protest Paradigm*

Gitlin (1980) first described the way media routines and practices marginalized and criminalized protests in the 1960s. Subsequent work by Chan and Lee (1984) identified the pattern of media coverage and named it the "protest paradigm." After conducting numerous studies of protest movements and building upon existing research, McLeod and Hertog (1999) refined the protest paradigm to demonstrate patterns in media coverage that negatively affect groups who are challenging authority. McLeod and Hertog's typology includes four distinct frames which range from *marginalizing frames* that focus on the protesters to *balanced frames* which meet the normative standards of journalism but are the least utilized. The protest paradigm further manifests when journalists highlight official sources and definitions, rather than voices from the opposition group. Journalists continue to marginalize protest groups by invoking the public's opinion to illustrate how the protesters are violent, criminal, and not to be taken seriously.

Communication scholars have utilized the protest paradigm to analyze both traditional and digital platforms. Brasted (2005) found that the *Chicago Tribune* framed protesters during 1968 Democratic National Convention as lawbreakers and vagrants. Harlow and Johnston (2011) analyzed the *New York Times* coverage of the 2011 revolution in Egypt and found that a spectacle frame was utilized "that hyped up violence and drama" (p. 1367). Marginalization frames were also utilized by MSNBC during coverage of right leaning Tea Party groups—characterizing group members as "idiots" (Weaver & Scacco, 2013).

### *Summary*

The events of Ferguson represent a unique intersection of social unrest, live news coverage, varied witnesses, and a rupture in journalistic routines. Unlike the coverage of protests from years past, a minute-by-minute record of events in real time from multiple journalists exists—in the form of a Twitter stream. Twitter both disrupts and underscores the journalistic community. Because they are short, 140-character bursts of information, they represent a unique form of message construction appropriate for framing analysis. Tweets from Ferguson represent a unique moment for revisiting the protest paradigm in the digital age, and make it possible to articulate the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** What does the Twitter feed reflect about the professional identity of journalists covering the event?
**Research Question 2:** What does the Twitter feed reflect about news coverage of social resistance?
**Research Question 3:** What is the nature of the multimodal (visual, linguistic, video) coverage available on Twitter?

## Method

After the events of August 2014 and the Grand Jury announcement of November 2014, it is safe to estimate the number of tweets associated with the Ferguson hashtag in the thousands. Although a "big-data" quantitative content analysis might provide answers about the evolution of the story, no automated system yet exists for analyzing visual and verbal characteristics of tweets. The multi-modal nature of the Twitter feed provides a rich corpus for exploration and invites the more nuanced understanding made possible by qualitative analysis.

This project used a purposive sample of tweets from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch.* The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* is one of the largest daily newspapers in the Midwestern United States and the leading newspaper for Greater St. Louis. As of March 2014, the average daily circulation of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was 186,820 on weekdays and 479,281 on Sundays. The readership on the online platform is almost 15 times the size of the St. Louis population: its online version has an average of 4.7 million unique visitors and almost 68 million page views per month (Lee.net, 2014).

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* covered the Michael Brown shooting from beginning in its print and online website. The paper assigned multiple reporters to the protests in August, and published its tweets from the August 11-21 time period to its website as part of its larger online Ferguson coverage. During that time frame, the news organization produced thousands of tweets—updating its readers about the Michael Brown shooting investigation and community protests. The newspaper also re-tweeted updates from its reporters' personal feeds, from citizen journalists, local officials, and a few selected community members.

We narrowed our analysis to the evening tweets spanning August 15 and August 20, 2014. This time period was selected for two reasons (a) protesters and police officers were clashing on the streets on a nightly basis around that time period, and (b) six journalists were arrested the evening on August 18—a moment that forced President Obama to state that the freedom of the press must be "vigilantly safeguarded, especially in moments like these" (Stelter, 2014). We examined the "second shift" tweets starting in the late afternoon in accordance with the cycle of protests (which receded overnight into the early mornings). Using both a deductive approach and inductive approach, the researchers analyzed 741 tweets from that time period: the words, images, and videos. The research team utilized a deductive approach to compare the tweets with McLeod and Hertog's (1999) four-part typology. At the same time, the researchers deployed an inductive style to allow new themes to emerge from the data. A description of the corpus can be found in Table 1.

## Findings

Tweets from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from August 15 through 20 reveal changes in the way journalists established their professional community and continuity in the way they cover civil unrest. For the most part, the Twitter feed reinforced the protest paradigm, though visual journalists on the scene tended to frame the protesters more sympathetically. Twitter also allowed the newspaper to convey new types of information in the form of video and non-professional contributions. The newspaper re-tweeted content from citizen journalists who were on the frontlines of the protest and produced provocative coverage, which, in turn, influenced the way the newspaper journalists used social media.

### *Extending the Protest Paradigm*

The tweet stream selected for analysis included reporter tweets, Vines from a local alderman/activist, and

**Table 1.** An Inventory of Tweets.

| Tweeting period: 6:30 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Night 1 | Night 2 | Night 3 | Night 4 | Night 5 |
| August 15-16 | August 16-17 | August 17-18 | August 18-19 | August 19-20 |
| Total tweets: 183 | Total tweets: 179 | Total tweets: 109 | Total tweets: 163 | Total tweets: 107 |
| Total photos: 30 | Total photos: 19 | Total photos: 26 | Total photos: 30 | Total photos: 36 |
| Total videos: 1 | Total videos: 20 | Total videos: 7 | Total videos: 11 | Total videos: 0 |

re-tweets from citizen journalists and other witnesses. This multiplicity of voices presenting a wide variety of perspectives and yet the overall message from the collection is one that extends the protest paradigm. Our analysis identified five themes by which the tweets marginalized the protesters: (a) portraying police as dispassionate protectors of social order, (b) framing the protests as violent riots perpetrated by law-breaking protesters, (c) ignoring the issues at the heart of the protest, (d) invoking public opinion through "innocent" business owners who were "victimized" by protesters, and (e) serving as real-time "storm watchers." These themes can be seen in what the journalists chose to tweet about and the words they used in their tweets.

*Police officers as dispassionate protectors of social order.* The journalists approached every evening with an eye of suspicion toward the protesters who took to the streets. The tweets rarely questioned the assertions made by police officers:

- (chriskingstl; August 16, 2014; 11:14 p.m.): My sources have said the instigators come out at night up the foot trails from Jennings. Police intel knows that. Hope they use it tonight.
- (nickpistor; August 17, 2014; 1:28 a.m.): I say this with a bit of self interest: I hope the police have a plan. Hearing pops from all different directions. #Ferguson

The protesters are framed as highly emotional beings, whereas the police officers are framed as dispassionate.

- (phampel; August 15, 2014; 7:51 p.m.): #Ferguson #MikeMike Man drawing crowd at QT. "I don't know about you but I am tired of these motherfucking cops." http://pbs.twimg.com/media/BvHv2-qCUAEh4YN.jpg
- (KoranAddo; August 16, 2014; 12:46 p.m.): Police are back. #Ferguson protesters are angry again. Phone's about to die so updates will be sporadic. #MikeBrown
- (phampel; August 19, 2014; 9:59 p.m.): #Ferguson #NorthSTL A preacher said not all cops bad. This woman told him fuck the police!

The emotions of police officers are never revealed. Journalists frame the police as having to defend themselves from an angry mob, rather than protesters defending themselves from a highly militarized response.

- (nickpistor; August 17, 2014; 12:34 a.m.): Police official declares: "fall in." Protester chants pick up. #Ferguson
- (twitjb; August 18, 2014; 11:47 p.m.): Police form a defensive position as they prepare to march on protesters. #Ferguson#MikeBrowntwitpic.com/eaebbf
- (huyMach; August 20, 2014; 12:14 a.m.): Tony Wheeler of Springfield tries to play peace keeper after items were thrown at the police at midnight http://pbs.twimg.com/media/BvdgMZFIgAAuLz_.jpg

*Protests as violent riots perpetrated by law-breaking protesters.* The journalists tweeting framed the protests as battles that pitted police officers against the protesters. The tweets depicted the protests, not as a moment for individuals to exercise their right to assemble over the shooting of Michael Brown, instead the protests were framed as a war zone:

- (nickpistor; August 17, 2014; 12:32 a.m.): Intense. I've never covered a war. But this is starting to feel like one. No one has moved yet. Standstill. #Ferguson
- (kodacohen; August 17, 2014; 10:43 p.m.): Protestors flee scene after marching toward police command center, tear gas flying in #Ferguson #MikeBrown http://pbs.twimg.com/media/BvS394XIMAASPAZ.jpg
- (stevegiegerich; August 18, 2014; 9:47 p.m.): Cops putting on helmets. Situation tense as marchers reach Ferguson Ave. #Ferguson#MichaelBrown@stltoday

Instead of questioning the police department's highly militarized response and the constitutionality of firing tear gas on people exercising their right to assemble, the journalists highlighted the legal violations of a few protesters:

- (AmyKNelson; August 17, 2014; 12:07 a.m.): This is not good. there are guys armed & they are gathering at top of the road. "we're making history tonight"

- (joelcurrier; August 17, 2014; 2:23 a.m.): Protesters defy curfew as police, politicians in power struggle over peacekeeping efforts in #ferguson bit.ly/1m7rJI1 via @STLtoday
- (TheTechCEO; August 17, 2014; 8:45 p.m.): They just looted the McDonalds by me! #Ferguson http://pbs.twimg.com/media/BvSYR2VIMAEEhcm.jpg

Note the use of the word "they" and the way it situates the protesters as a mass of "others." Other tweets are more direct, using words like "defiance," for protesters standing yards away from police, or the term "angry mob" in hypothetical terms.

*Rare discussions about issues.* The tweet stream does contain some references to the systemic inequalities at the heart of the protest, but such remarks were rare. Even so, one of the only tweets that mentioned race was critical of the protest, and one that quoted a participant used colloquial spelling that marginalizes the man being quoted:

- (nickpistor; August 17, 2014; 1:44 a.m.): One must think there are better ways for us to handle our racial problems than nightly battles on a street in Missouri. #Ferguson
- (phampel; August 19, 2014; 10:31 p.m.): #Ferguson #NorthSTL Trey says, "People here upset cuz cops shot a man they cud have tazed or hit with a billy club."

*Victimized business owners invoke public opinion.* Another rhetorical strategy used to marginalize protesters is to use the voices of "everyday" people to invoke public opinion in criticism of the protesters. In the case of the Ferguson protest, journalists invoked public opinion by framing the business owners as victims of the law-breaking protesters:

- (joelcurrier; August 17, 2014; 2:54 a.m.): Johnson: Our businesses have to remain healthy.
- (phampel; August 19, 2014; 8:20 p.m.): #Ferguson #NorthSTL Business owner, citing fear, hauled goods out of shop she rents from Ald Dionne Flowers.
- (phampel; August 19, 2014; 10:35 p.m.): #Ferguson #NorthSTL Owner of Six Star Market has brought in relatives as reinforcements. They have locked themselves inside.

*Journalists as real-time storm chasers.* If journalism is the first draft of history, a Twitter stream is its notebook. One of the most pronounced themes to surface from this analysis is that of the protest as a natural disaster. The minute-by-minute tweets from journalists often used the storm metaphor, and situated the journalists as storm "chasers" who were watching the storm approach. This metaphor underscores the protest as exciting and dangerous while spotlighting the bravery and fortitude of the journalists on location:

- (nickpistor; August 16, 2014; 10:46 p.m.): The intensity increases out here every second closer we get to midnight. #Ferguson
- (nickpistor; August 16, 2014; 11:55 p.m.): 5 minutes til midnight. Thunder roars in #Ferguson. "This is the showdown you have waited for," woman yells. #Ferguson
- (valeriehahn; August 18, 2014; 9:13 p.m.): Train rumbles on bridge a block from Family Dollar. Made my heart pound a bit. #Ferguson

## *Tweets as Multi-Modal Messages*

The tweets included in this analysis contained many images from journalists and non-professionals and quite a few videos, mostly from a city alderman who served as a productive citizen journalist early on. Our qualitative analysis of the images found that, as Messaris (1997) might have predicted, the tweets were able to depict race and gender in ways that would not be acceptable to address with words alone Twitter is multi-modal, and Ferguson protests were visually covered on Twitter almost as much as their textual counterparts. However, differences occurred between tweets and Twitpics in what was shown, how it was shown and who the producer was. For example, one of the most notable trends was posting of Vine videos on the spot. Professional journalists did not pick up on this tool until after a citizen journalist, alderman Antonio French, started aggressively posting videos of the protests, especially when things got heated.

*Visual practice.* Among the visual products, there were significant differences depending on who was the producer. Images from the professional visual journalists display an apparent effort to get closer to the protesters and police than their word-oriented colleagues. Aesthetically, professional visual journalists tended to produce higher quality images, using the principles of composition, light, angle, and technical expertise to tell the story. Still, although professional journalists were able to provide higher quality images, they were not posting them in real time. Because the professional visual press was closer, the images convey a more sympathetic frame to the individual protesters and police officers. This driving impulse in photojournalism to "get close" reflects the human interest frame Fahmy and colleagues ( 2014) identified with regard to war coverage.

Visual coverage was a bit harder to track over time, because the photojournalists on-site had to bundle their uploads. Instead of live tweeting, they would upload their best images at one time—often after the protests were subsiding. The

minute-to-minute photographs from reporters were often far away from the action and hard to interpret. The activist/alderman citizen journalist who tweeted with Vines was the closest to the protests. For the audience, the mix of professional and citizen journalist content felt rather seamless.

Interestingly, the analysis shows that compared with their writer-colleagues, visual journalists were not consistently present on Twitter. They hardly ever used mobile devices directly for their visual reporting. It seems that their priority was to document the events with their professional gear and transmit the visuals for publication as fast as possible. Updating their Twitter accounts came last. For example, on August 17, between roughly 10:30 and 11:15 p.m., @kodacohen posted 10 visuals. On the night of August 16, @PDPJ posted three images in a row in less than 10 min. What these photographers ended up posting were professional images from their cameras, that had higher visual quality aesthetically and in terms of the information they provided.

*Race and image.* Throughout the protests in Ferguson, questions about the racial and gender demographics of the city in comparison with the city police department's racial and gender distribution arose. Although African Americans constitute majority of the city population, only three of mostly male 53 officers at the Ferguson Police Department are African Americans. And the police chief, Thomas Jackson, is White. In addition, although this was not apparent from the Twitter coverage, a significant majority of the journalists who covered the events were White males. On the contrary, protestors shown in Twitpics and videos were mainly young Black males. This conclusion was drawn from the images that were tweeted, not the texts. Although the text tweets did not necessarily touched upon the racial demographics, the racial division between the protestors, officers, and journalists was an obvious observation in visuals:

- (Twitjib; August 19, 2014; 12:52 a.m.): Police arrest a protester after he taunted them Monday night in Ferguson. #Ferguson#MikeBrowntwitpic.com/eaeb2f

The above tweet shows more than a dozen officers, most of whom are White, arresting a Black protester. Some of the police officers have drawn their assault rifles, pointing the weapons at the person taking the photograph. Another tweet (below) clearly shows the significant racial barrier between the officers and protesters:

- (huymach; August 20, 2014; 1:12 a.m.): Tense situation as police rushed towards a group of people on W. Florrisant Ave. at midnight. http://pbs.twimg.com/media/BvdfmFlCcAMicyb.jpg

As a group of Black protesters are huddled behind a concrete barricade, the above tweet shows White officers marching through a crowd—some yelling and armed with rifles and batons.

*Inspiration from a citizen journalist.* Antonio French, the aforementioned alderman, was a major figure in the visual coverage of the protests from the very beginning with his short Vine videos. He fully used and embraced Vine as a tool of journalism and used it frequently to report the protests. All along, the tone of his videos was provocative, usually staying close to the action, attempting to document the heat of each moment. French had no claims of journalistic objectivity, as he would post tweets such as the following:

- (AntonioFrench; August 16, 2014; 10:42 p.m.): "Some brothers are harder to convince. #ferguson vine.co/v/M3MiALDJVln"\

He was certainly an activist, siding with the protestors while executing his own reporting. His usage of Vine videos triggered professional journalist to turn to this tool, as well.

### A "Real-Time" Interpretive Community

The storm metaphor discussed above served to enhance the image of the reporters as brave and dedicated, and constituted one theme that defined the interpretive community. These tweets were occasionally jokes or wisecracks, breaking down that fourth wall Mourão (2015), described and illustrated by these tweets:

- (valeriehahn; August 18, 2014; 9:47 p.m.): Got a text from a friend. "Any news?" he asks. "Duh," I respond. #Ferguson
- (valeriehahn; August 18, 2014; 11:16 p.m.): Glad mom and dad aren't on Twitter. #Ferguson
- (JesseBogan; August 19, 2014; 10:32 p.m.): #Ferguson. All the media on west flor remind me of feeding fish at Meramec Springs hatchery. Swarms come up with the slightest drop of food.

Coverage in the Twitter stream blurred the lines between citizen and professional journalism *and* the personal and professional. Reporters often used their own Twitter accounts. The newspaper relied on individual reporters to tweet from the scene using their own accounts, rather than an official "newspaper" account.

## Discussion

Examining the Twitter stream of a local newspaper as the Ferguson protests unfolded provides a close-up view of news practices under pressure. The events in Ferguson were unusual for their duration, the way they attracted international media,

and for the way members of the media were caught, quite literally, in the events.

This qualitative analysis of a theoretically defined corpus found that much of the coverage reflected and extended the protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Journalists' tweeting generally sided with police officers by reflecting their views and interests. Journalists from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* relied heavily on authorities for information and to interpret events. Repeatedly tweets from Ferguson used language ("angry mob," "defiance," and "they") in ways that disassociated journalists from the protesters and aligned them with the police and the social order. The use of humor and "backstage" comments in tweets, as well as the storm chasing metaphor, served as a bit of self-congratulatory discourse. Throughout the 5 days under study, journalists worked to establish themselves as the legitimate, on the ground witnesses of something extraordinary—brave witnesses, to boot.

The voices of average citizens rarely appeared in the tweets, even though Twitter's format is quick and informal. Such coverage reflects what Gans (1979) identified decades ago: that journalists have trouble crossing the social barriers that separate them from strangers. The mostly White police force of Ferguson and St. Louis, on which reporters rely directly for information every day, held more sway for reporters on the scene.

This analysis predictably extended another aspect of the protest paradigm, the larger social forces that led to the unrest. Adopting the "storm watch" frame gives the impression that this social disorder was a product of forces outside of social control. In this way, again, as Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979) would have predicted a generation ago, journalists served as agents of social control and not as populist actors. When they themselves were subject to police action, tweets from the journalists took a more sympathetic turn; breathing the same tear gas seemingly inspired greater sympathy for the protesters and their cause. Images posted on Twitter often seemed disconnected to the words, a pattern that has long troubled scholars who study news images (Zelizer, 1993).

This qualitative project did identify some new coverage characteristics worthy of further research, particularly with regard to Twitter's multi-modality. For instance, tweets from the visual journalists, who for the sake of their photographic work, seemed more sympathetic to the protesters throughout the nights of our sample. The citizen-journalism Vine-producing alderman also seemed to have an impact on journalistic practice. Even though he left the scene partway through the protests, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* journalists apparently took up the practice of posting Vines, though theirs were contextualized more in line with traditional protest framing. Journalists also used sarcasm and dark humor as a way of establishing their professional boundaries, in keeping with Mourão's (2015) observations.

## Conclusion

This study explored the way one news outlet's Twitter feed covered the Ferguson protests, with attention to how the tweets framed the protest ideologically and reflected the way journalists discursively define their professional boundaries. The researchers examined one Twitter stream over 5 days, seeking depth and nuanced understanding of the way the protest was framed. The tweets extended the protest paradigm and the theory of journalists as an interpretive community. The stream also contributed to new understandings of how minute-to-minute coverage involves a mix of straight news comments, feature coverage, and a touch of journalistic transparency, but very little about the social forces that led to the protest.

Qualitative textual analysis using theoretically strategic samples cannot be generalized in the ways that random-sample studies can. Yet events like the one in Ferguson in 2014 cannot be manipulated in a laboratory. This project attempted to look closely at a limited set of tweets to look for patterns and learn more about how images, videos, and words work in a real-time context. Although we found, in large part, an extension of the protest paradigm, there were enough fissures in this ideological pattern—inspiration from citizen journalists, populist sympathies inside the crowd, and a divide between visual and textual coverage—to warrant more research on social media's impact on journalism.

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