Given the great excitement recently for “Star Wars: The Last Jedi”, I decided an interesting topic of research would be about the two main characters (actors) of the film. Mark Hamill is reprising his role from the original Star Wars trilogy and moviegoers are excited to see their old hero back on the big screen. But how would his popularity compare with Rey played by Daisy Ridley? Creating a new lead character in a time-honored film franchise is an important and risky undertaking. On top of this, Star Wars has, for the most part, been a film franchise that has mostly appealed to male audiences with very few female cast and characters. In contrast however, the two most recent films have intentionally featured diverse casts and female leads. Given the level of importance of the Star Wars films in the public eye and in the interests of LucasFilm’s and Disney’s financial interests, it is important to gauge how much buzz and excitement each character may be getting in social media. Will fans look forward more to their familiar, male hero or to their new, female heroine?

I used Twitter’s REST API to collect tweets spanning the course of two weeks (Dec 12 to Dec18) leading up to and slightly after the release of “The Last Jedi”. I only searched for tweets relating to the upcoming film. I wanted to know who moviegoers are looking forward to. Mark Hamill has starred in three films already, has a large fan base, and is an active user on twitter whereas Daisy Ridley has only starred in one film and is not active on twitter.

I was able to find 61400 tweets with “Last Jedi” related hashtags in their text. Of those, I searched the text to see if hashtags with the actor’s or character’s names were in them. I found 1275 tweets (about 2% of all tweets collected) that contained hashtags of the two actors/characters in this study. Tweets about both characters were counted for each actor. I ran two one-sided 1-sample proportion tests for each actor. Given Mark Hamill’s advantage in being a recognized, male lead in Star Wars with an active twitter presence I wanted to test whether the proportion of tweets about Luke is greater than 50%. The results do not support that claim. It actually appears that the proportion of tweets about Luke is less than 50%. The actual proportion of Luke tweets in this sample is about 38%.

For Rey’s case, I wanted to test whether the proportion of tweets about Rey is less than 50%. The results do not support that claim as well. It actually appears that the proportion of tweets about Rey is greater than 50%. The actual proportion of Rey tweets in this sample is about 62%. *Figure 1* below shows a basic graph showing the number of tweets for each actor amongst the 1275 relevant tweets

I also ran a simple textual analysis of each tweet. I counted the number of exclamation points in each text to get a sense of the level of excitement about each tweet. I ran a two-sample, one-sided T-Test to compare the mean number of exclamation points in the tweets of each actor. I wanted to test if the difference between each actor’s mean number of exclamation points is equal to or less than zero. In other words, to see if the average level of excitement for Luke’s tweets is equal to or less than the average level of excitement for Rey’s tweets. The results of this indicate that there is not enough evidence to reject the claim that the mean excitement of Luke’s tweets is the same as or less than the mean excitement of Rey’s tweets.

The results of this study seem to indicate that moviegoers are tweeting more and at a higher average excitement level about Rey than about Luke. This may indicate a powerful shift among the interests and nature of Star Wars fans as a result of Disney/Lucasfilm proactively casting female lead heroines in recent Star Wars films.

*Figure 1*

