

**Reading Between the (Party) Lines:  
How Political News is Seen and Shared**

by

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Submitted to the Program in Media Arts and Sciences,  
School of Architecture and Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Media Arts and Sciences

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

September 2016

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## Abstract

This thesis uses mixed methods and datasets to explore how political news is perceived and shared within and across party lines in the context of the 2016 US presidential elections. We begin by examining the impact of political context versus article content on the reader through a crowdsourced study, and follow up with a large scale analysis of story sharing on the social platform Twitter to find cases where popularity transcends political affiliation.

In Part One, we look at reader *reactions*. We investigate the question of trust in political news by performing a study online. We look at the impact of content features (reading level of the article) versus context clues (media brands) to find that political affiliation and brand outweigh all other aspects.

In the second part of this thesis, we focus on reader *actions*. In particular, we look at how political news stories from the same time period are shared on the social media platform Twitter. As we found party loyalty and media brand perceptions to be significant influences on the reader's opinion of news, we are especially interested in examining emotional features that cause stories to become popular beyond political boundaries.

Together, these two parts hope to form a more complete view of factors affecting and driving readers in an election cycle that is heavily influenced by media coverage, both traditional and new.

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