



Graduate Studies News

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“I think social media use while watching television is going to continue to sky-rocket...”

-Esther Thorson

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“We the Tweepers” by Emily Brehe

Graduate students, faculty and fellows researching at the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) have turned to social media titan Twitter to discover what users are saying about the 2012 Presidential Debates across the nation, as well as in metropolitan areas.

“We are interested in Twitter reactions to the debates [as well as] other political events. We believe Twitter offers an opportunity for citizens to react to and participate in political events like the debates or the conventions,” said Dr. Brian Houston, Communication Assistant Professor and co-leader of the research team.

In the project, called “We the Tweepers,” researchers downloaded and analyzed tweets about the debates to try to understand users’ reaction to the broadcasts. The project is affiliated with three newspapers—the *Florida Times-Union*, the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Seattle Times*. Each publication promotes a certain hashtag to allow researchers to monitor different reactions from these three regions. The research team also collects data nationwide to compare to the tweets from the three cities.

One researcher explained that this is the first election where citizens can actively engage in the live Twitter feed and state their reaction as the debate is still tak-

ing place. The quickness of social media allows for researchers to get a better grasp on how the public views either candidate.

“This is the first election where social media is playing a big role in the conversation about the candidates so it’s important for both journalists and media scholars to understand what voters are talking about. Unlike prior debates, we no longer have to wait days for a poll to tap into what voters think is important,” said Alicia Swasy, second-year doctoral student and member of the research team.

Twitter also offers the opportunity for the audience to become actively engaged in the debate, as they process their thoughts and opinions into a tweet, or partake in their own conversations and debates between other Twitter users. In an analysis of the first debate, researchers determined that “Momentum among Tweepers remained strong during the entire 90 minutes, showing how social media users do not trail off the way television viewers do during such broadcasts.”

During the first two debates, tweets rolled in by the thousands. At its prime, the feed for the first Presidential Debate piled-in at 21,963 tweets per minute. The discussion between the Vice President candidates also showed an abundant interest, with a total 3.5 million tweets during the 90-minute debate.



As the candidates took the stage for the last time before Election Day, Twitter ignited as researchers found their highest peak overall—at 78,250 tweets per minute—when Romney accused Obama of reducing military spending.

Today such studies as “We the Tweepers” look to develop an understanding of how interaction between the audience and the news is changing as technology advances. Dr. Esther Thorson, Associate Dean of Journalism Graduate Studies and Director of Research at RJI, predicts that social media will play a significant role in how citizens engage many forms of news.

“I think social media use while watching television is going to continue to sky-rocket—and it will provide a great window into figuring out how people watch TV, how they think about politics, sports, entertainment events, and the overall role of media in their lives,” Thorson said.



What's in a #Hashtag? By Emily Brehe

"We the Tweeters" tracked the conversation in select metropolitan areas by asking publications to promote a hashtag. The tags allowed researchers to narrow down the thousands of tweets to hundreds. Since 2009, hashtags have acted as an innovative way to communicate.

Definition: A hashtag is "a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#), used within a message to identify a keyword or topic of interest and facilitate a search for it." (www.dictionary.com)

Beyond Twitter: Although Twitter was the first to utilize hashtags in the social media realm; other sites have picked up on its usefulness. These sites include popular sites such as YouTube, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram.

Event Tags: Hashtags can be used to promote different events. Twitter allows users to track several different per-

spectives by asking participants to include tags in their tweets. A tag can be assigned to small gatherings such as weddings, as well as massive affairs like the SXSW Film Festival. By tracking this tag, users have access to a much larger amount of photos, opinions, news, links, etc.

The Feed: Have you ever wondered if someone is thinking the exact same thing as you at the exact same time? Clicking on the linked hashtag in one's tweet will lead to a page with a list of similar posts from users throughout Twitter.

What's Trending?: To the left of a user's Twitter homepage, one can view the network's top ten topics, listed as hashtags. These topics can be promoted items, targeted locally, or be most tweeted tags at that point in time. This allows users to join the conversation on mass topics such as Hurricane Sandy, Cardinals baseball, or the Presidential Debates.

Doctoral Student Spotlight: Joy Jenkins



Joy Jenkins is a first-year doctoral student who joined our program in Fall 2012.

1. Tell us a little about yourself.

I am from Oklahoma City but have lived in Tulsa, Okla., for the last seven years. I earned my BA in Journalism in 2004 from The University of Oklahoma and my MS in Mass Communications/Media Management in 2011 from Oklahoma State University. Professionally, I served as senior editor for *TulsaPeople Magazine*, the city magazine in Tulsa, and prior to that was the copy editor at the *Oklahoma Gazette*, the alternative newsweekly in Oklahoma City. I was also involved with the Oklahoma Professional Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and the Tulsa Chapter of the Association for Women in Communications. I moved to Columbia with my husband, Hank, who works as the youth ministry leader at

Missouri United Methodist Church and is finishing his last year of seminary.

2. Why did you choose the Missouri School of Journalism?

While working on my master's degree, I developed an interest in studying magazines, particularly city and regional magazines, and how editors are navigating the shift to online forms of content distribution. As a result, I sought out programs that had faculty focused on studying as well as teaching about magazines, and I knew this was a strong emphasis at Missouri. Additionally, when I visited Columbia last spring to tour the Missouri campus and meet with a few faculty, I was impressed not only by the facilities and beautiful campus but also by the friendliness of the faculty and staff and their willingness to connect me with resources that would aid my educational experience. I was excited that I could take classes and participate in research experiences that would complement my area of interest. I also knew that I would have access to mentors who would guide me in my doctoral experience and beyond.

3. Tell us about what you are doing in the program.

This year, I am working as a research assistant with Dr. Amanda Hinnant and Dr. Keith Greenwood. I am working with Dr. Hinnant and fellow doctoral student Roma Subramanian on a study about health journalists. I am also assisting Dr. Greenwood with research on the use of photojournalism in company magazines. Additionally, I have been assisting Dean Esther Thorson and doctoral student Mimi Perreault with a study on public journalism.

4. What do you want to do after you've received your degree?

I aim to earn an assistant professor position at a university where I can continue to study how magazine editors are using new media and the effects of new technology on how they do their jobs. I would also like to teach courses related to magazine writing and editing, and I would love to work with students as a magazine or yearbook adviser.

News

Debra L. Mason has been named Assistant Editor-Religion for the Media Diversity Forum. The forum is a partnership of the Manship School of Mass Communication and the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs, both at Louisiana State University. Mason is responsible for providing weekly resources and news entries on religion and diversity. Mason also presented a talk in September (Sept. 14) about "Religion and News" at the biennial



"Church Up Close" program for journalists, held at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome.

Journalism PhD baby Evangeline Perreault turned one on October 24. Thanks to all the Journalism faculty, staff and PhD students for their support in her first year. We could not have done it without our J-School family. --**Mimi and Greg Perreault**

Presentations

Perreault, G. "Mickey Mouse Magic with Interactivity and Immersion: A Case Study of Kingdom Hearts." Paper to be presented at the National Communication Association, Orlando, FL, November 2012.

Publications

Byron Scott. (2012). *Barnies: Forty Years of Theatre Under the Stars at Maplewood Barn*. Kelly Press, Columbia, MO.

Byron Scott and Ellada Gamreklidze. (2013). "Filling-in-the-Blanks During National Crises: The Good and Bad of Social Media in Georgia." *Social Media Go to War: Rage, Rebellion and Revolution in the Age of Twitter* (Ralph Berenger, ed.). Marquette Books, Seattle.

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SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, ANNOUNCEMENT, OR ITEM OF INTEREST

Deadline for submission for the December newsletter is Monday, November 26. Late submissions will be included on a space- available basis, or in a following month.