**Diversity in Canadian election-related Twitter discourses:
Influential voices and the media logic of #elxn42 and #cdnpoli hashtags**

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Abstract

Using qualitative and quantitative content analysis of Twitter, this study examined 5,209 tweets with popular hashtags #elxn42 and #cdnpoli to determine what was discussed on the social media platform one week preceding the 2015 Canadian federal election. Searching for diversity-related issues, researchers asked whether diverse groups were represented among the most influential accounts. It also identified the most common topics shared, and whether the shared content represented democratic discussion. Finally, the study looked at how much election-related sharing among influencers conformed to a media logic or social media logic framework. Researchers found that Twitter use during the election campaign did not provide a level playing field for political discussion. Instead, data suggested individual celebrity users were more likely to be amplified than others. Despite this, however, it appears that issues that were relevant to diverse groups made it into the Twitter conversation, making up a meaningful portion of tweets related to the election, and suggesting that if diverse voices were not retweeted, at least issues were still being discussed, and thus provides little support for the popular idea of online echo chambers on Twitter.

Keywords: Content analysis, Twitter, diversity, media logics, politics

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Introduction

The availability of information is of vital importance to democratic participation (Habermas, 1983); however, information has not traditionally been evenly available to all communities, and has been influenced by the interests of those with the means to control communication channels. The distribution of political information has tended to be subject to a variety of competing media logics, which rely on framing information as entertainment to attract and hold consumers' attention. Social media sites such as Twitter were originally seen as a potential challenge to this informational inequality. Since anyone could post information, which could then be viewed by anyone else on these platforms, scholars initially thought that social media could democratize political participation and level the playing field for traditionally marginalized political actors. However, social media are subject to media logics of their own. While once they may have afforded new and exciting forms of political participation exemplified by movements like #idlenomore, #occupy, and #arabspring, political communication on social media has recently become more complicated (Tufekci, 2017). Though every voice can be potentially posted on sites like Twitter, not every post has an equal opportunity of reaching others widely. Specific individuals and topics demonstrate an outsized influence, leading some scholars to speculate about the presence of online echo chambers (Soderberg, 2017).

This paper uses content analysis to explore this issue specifically in regards to the 2015 Canadian federal election. We examine the most influential Twitter content for the two most popular election-related hashtags, #elxn42 and #cdnpoli, to determine how many tweets relating to diversity were trending in the week prior to the election. We find that key influencers make up

the majority of popular or retweeted election-related tweets. Despite this finding, however, we show that topics of interest to diverse groups were still given airtime on Twitter during the election, suggesting that while a few twitter users wield outsize influence, there are still a wide diversity of topics covered on the platform. We show how both media logic and social media logic can help us understand the content that spreads on Twitter during election time. This article begins with an analysis of media logic and social media logic, then looks at social media and Twitter as sources of political information. We examine influential tweets from the week prior to the election to show competing media logics at play and how they may inform the popularity of content across the platforms. Finally, we show that while fears of filter bubbles and echo chambers are overblown, there is evidence of a relatively small number of influential voices that tend to dominate twitter, suggesting that the platform does not really level the communication playing field during election time.

Media logic and political messaging: An overview

media logic: a definition. Media logic is defined as “the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium ...[including]... rhythm, grammar and format” (Altheide, 2004, p. 294). The logic of a particular medium will influence what content is presented, how it is presented, how it is framed, and how audiences interpret or consume it. According to Altheide (2004; 2013), media logic has influenced journalism and news production. News is required to fit into an entertainment format because that is what audiences and advertisers expect. Though Altheide studied American news, media logic does not only impact U.S. news media. There is evidence that entertainment-driven media logic is becoming part of global media cultures. For example, politicians in the Netherlands have adopted a media logic similar to the entertainment frame found in U.S.-based political communication (Brants and Van

Praag, 2006). Similarly, a study in Belgium showed that politicians who employed media logic in campaign messaging were more successful than others who did not (Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe and Fiers, 2008).

political logic and its relationship to media logic. By shaping the ways news is presented, media logic influences both the act of political campaigning and also the representations of politics, political campaigning, and politicians. In prioritizing messages that focus on the leaders rather than the parties, other individuals, or policies; and the contest (that is, horse-race style coverage), rather than platforms, media logic works to structure political coverage in specific ways (Cushion, Thomas, Kilby, Morani, and Sambrook, 2016; Takens, Van Atteveldt, van Hoof, and Kleinnijenhuis, 2013; Brants and Van Praag, 2006). In contrast to media logic, Political logic refers to the degree by which political needs or priorities influence how the media covers politics (Takens, Van Atteveldt, van Hoof and Kleinnijenhuis, 2013). Political logic also has a role to play in election coverage, however election news in many countries is moving toward a model dominated by media logic. Studies have also shown that the relationship between media logic and political logic is trending toward a model characterized coverage that focuses on the professionalization of politics and fragmentation of political parties (Takens, Van Atteveldt, van Hoof and Kleinnijenhuis, 2013). The picture of election coverage is further complicated by the dominance of social media use by politicians and journalists. Social media introduces a new logic that may also impact the presentation of political news.

social media logic. In a digital age, some scholars have refined the concept of media logic to accommodate new communication technologies. The logic of digital or social media, like traditional media logic, has an entertainment frame, and is driven by a need to attract advertisers' attention to support the medium in question (Altheide, 2013; van Dijck and Poell,

2013). It can be said that the 24/7 media landscape, wrought by constant social media updates, has influenced the media logic of more traditional news outlets like print and television, which now also have their own presence on social media platforms. This is part of what researchers call social media logic (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Social media logic is characterized by four elements: programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication, each of which will be discussed in turn.

In social media logic, *programmability* refers to the opaque relationship between programmers and platform users in which the latter influence what content trends across platforms, but the influence is neither consistent nor transparent. *Popularity* refers to the ways platforms boost certain people or ideas, creating social media celebrity styles, and trending topics. This process tends to complement the influence mass media logic exerts, and is similarly subject to an entertainment frame. *Connectivity* refers to the ability of social media to connect people (and brands) across what would have been traditional barriers of geography, time, or culture (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Finally, *datafication* refers to social media platforms' ability to quantify things never before quantified, such as preferences, shares, and emotional responses. This helps to create just-in-time, personalized content, and helps to deliver micro-targeted advertising messages to users. With Google and Facebook dominating the advertising industry (Goldfarb, 2014), traditional media sources are increasingly working within social media logic.

political branding and media logic. According to some scholars, one of the strategies used by government elites and bureaucrats to adapt to social media logic is creating a government brand “grounded in control, simplicity and consistency” and maintained across all government communication (Marland, Lewis and Flanagan, 2017, p.125). Political branding tends to involve both simplification and coordination of political messaging to make it consistent

across multiple platforms and issues. In Canada, this type of impression management occurs at all levels of government (Dumitrica, 2014; Marland, Lewis and Flanagan, 2017). Of course, political branding is not just a Canadian phenomenon. Scholars have noticed the rise of this behavior in different Western contexts, including the Tea Party movement in the United States (Busby and Cronshaw, 2015) and David Cameron or Tony Blair in the United Kingdom (Pich and Dean, 2015; Scammell, 2007). It has also been seen as a resource employed by the state in South Africa and Botswana (Youde, 2009; Hamer, 2016). Canadian research suggests that political branding occurs irrespective of party affiliation (Marland, 2013), and takes on a particular character due to the 24/7 digital information environment (Aucoin, 2008).

Central control of messaging, which involves shaping and disseminating key messages to reach target audiences with limited filtering or interruption, is key to political branding in the current information landscape (Marland, Lewis and Flanagan, 2017). To achieve this kind of message control it is necessary for political communicators to adapt to both the mass media logic described by Altheide (2013) and others, and the social media logic described by van Dijck and Poell (2013). For example, a study of the 2010 municipal election in Ottawa, Canada, revealed that journalists and other key online influencers drove election discussion on Twitter, showing the social media logic of connectivity and popularity (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2014). On the other hand, a study of 2010 general elections in the Netherlands did not identify a specific social media logic of connectivity, and instead found a mass media logic of hierarchical information flows based on existing power structures in Twitter election discourses (Vergeer and Hermans, 2013). Political messaging is further complicated when the issue of diversity is considered. Messages may need to appeal to diverse groups, some of whom have been typically underrepresented, as discussed in the next sections.

Diversity in media and politics

diversity, social ties and democratic communication. Research has shown that when bridging ties are built between diverse groups of people (Putnam, 2000; Harrell and Stolle, 2010), the ability for communities to function democratically increases (Quintelier, Stolle, and Harell, 2012). Some scholars suggest social media may be key to building and maintaining crucial bridging ties. For example, when college students use social media platforms, the number of bridging ties in their social networks increase, and that latent ties become weak or bridging ties through social media use (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2011). Diverse groups can take advantage of this affordance of social media platforms to build political capital. Diversity in political representation remains a pressing concern across the West (Durose, Richardson, Combs, Eason, and Gains, 2012). Politically successful diverse groups may be able to achieve success because they possess an acceptable level of difference in the eyes of a majority electorate (Durose, Richardson, Combs, Eason and Gains, 2012). Loosely-tied diverse groups may also be able to form counter-publics more easily than they have been able to in the past, and in turn these groups may have more influence on politics and political coverage that they did previously.

diversity in politics and political news. Diverse voices often remain absent from news coverage in the developed world (Phillips 2011). While online-only sources are slightly better in their coverage of diverse stories, researchers suspect economic pressures may dictate content even in an online environment of potentially infinite news space (Humprecht and Buchel, 2013). News discourses about diversity both reflect a society's cultural views, and also serve to construct and reinforce them through repetition and the sharing of values (Cotter, 2011). While online comments can level the playing field by offering different viewpoints on a story (Baden and Springer, 2014), the degree to which diverse issues receive coverage during election time

seems to be influenced both by a political logic unique to each election cycle as well as by media logic (Black and Hicks, 2008). In Canada, media messages often conform to a logic similar to the one Altheide described in the U.S. context, driven by the entertainment frame (Kozolanka, 2009). While some view new media technologies as an alternative to this (Shirky, 2010), others warn that care must be taken to not let corporate interests dictate the flow of online information (Barney, 2005).

Social media And Twitter for political communication

do social media level the playing field? Social media, loosely defined, are a group of internet-based communication technologies characterized by social connections between a user and other users known as “friends” or “followers” in their network (Dumitrica, 2014). Recently, social media have become increasingly popular sources of news. According to the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of U.S. adults got at least some news from social media in 2017, with two out of every 10 reporting they often access news this way (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017). Pew also reports that three-quarters of non-whites in the United States get news on social media sites, making these populations more likely than Caucasians to access news on social media. This is an important metric when considering the democratic information needs of diverse groups (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017).

Due to the ease of connecting and sharing content, many scholars have asked whether social media can help level the communication playing field by allowing underrepresented or marginalized groups a chance to reach a broad audience (Goode, 2009). Unlike traditional media, social media platforms allow each user to create and share content anyone can see (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2017; Halberstram and Knight, 2016; Vergeer and Hermans, 2013). Those who are interested in being involved politically, but have traditionally been marginalized to the edge of

the political playing field due to a lack of resources may find the low barrier to entry of political participation on social media platforms helps provide a venue for active participation (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2017). Furthermore, studies have suggested a positive correlation between political internet use and voter turnout. Just using the internet and social media politically may be enough to encourage some individuals to get out to the voting booth (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart and de Vreese, 2014).

On the other hand, a few powerful comments in a social media community or comment thread can sometimes also have the effect of creating a “spiral of silence”. For example, in a recent study, Zerbeck and Fawzi (2017) found that people supporting an issue may be less likely to speak out about their support when they are confronted with strong online comments contradicting their opinions. Other studies have suggested that echo chambers may be a problem for online political communication, and people tend to favor online communities in which there are many other like-minded individuals (Soderberg, 2017; Himmelboim, McCreery and Smith, 2013). Due to these echo chambers, social media could play a role in political polarization when people seek out communities with whom they agree politically (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2017).

Some scholars suggest that social media algorithms create filter bubbles in which people don’t have access to a wide variety of information (Pariser, 2011). Another concern is that social media algorithms re-assert established hierarchies, particularly in the sphere of political and journalistic communication (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2017). In contrast to an innovation hypothesis, which suggests that new communication technologies “fundamentally change the way politics is brought to the public” (Vergeer and Hermans, p. 401), the normalization hypothesis suggests that new technologies such as social media simply “reinforce[] existing power relations and maintain[] the status quo” (Vermeer and Hermans, p. 401). A study of

Swiss politicians on Twitter in 2016 seems to support the idea of normalization by showing that existing offline divisions between politicians and the public are reimagined on the social media platform (Rachfleisch and Metag, 2016). These studies raise the question of whether the communicative potential of participatory social technology is realized in the actual practice of political communication.

social media and political campaigning. Recently, it seems as though no political campaign can run successfully without some attention to social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, the latter of which is particularly popular among journalists and political leaders (Vergeer and Hermans, 2013). In a 2008 study, Williams and Gulati (2008) found electoral success could be closely tied to the number of Facebook supporters a politician has. A similar study of Twitter during the 2010 U.K. election showed Twitter mentions tracked more closely to national vote share than many more traditional opinion polls (Tweetminster, 2010). Given the importance of a social media presence for election success, political leaders tend to deliberately employ these tools in their campaigning practice. When they do, their messaging is influenced by two properties of social media networks: perceived authenticity and networks of influence.

Since social media are characterized by their ability to help users create and maintain social ties, social media logic, as articulated by van Dijk and Poell (2013), requires a personalization that might also be described as a need for authenticity, or at least a perceived authenticity (Dumitrica, 2014). In reality, political communication is heavily managed and branded both on and offline (Marland, Lewis and Flanagan, 2017), however, messages are carefully managed to seem informal, and make politicians seem approachable. Politicians have noted the necessity of posting to social media as themselves, rather than posting anonymously, and felt it was extremely difficult to maintain an identity online that didn't align with their

personality, interests and values (Nilsson and Carlsson, 2013). Similarly, 15% of politicians examined in a recent study by Tromble (2016) actively interact with members of the public using social media, demonstrating a willingness to use platforms like Twitter to listen to constituents.

Twitter and election issues. Twitter is a microblog which allows users to post updates of 280 (previously 140) characters or less from their computer, tablet, or smartphone. Originally developed as a way to post to the web through short message service or text messaging, it was soon expanded, allowing people to connect and share topics of interest in real time, respond or retweet, and add mixed media elements like photos and videos to the original text. Pew Research reports that 74% of Twitter users get news on the site (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017). Canadians in particular are regular Twitter users with 27% of Canada's population on Twitter in 2017 compared with 19.5% of the U.S. population in the same year (Maloney, 2017).

Twitter has also become very popular with politicians. Around the world, citizen demand and cultures promoting digital media use have resulted in politicians using Twitter as part of an online communication toolkit which includes campaign websites, Facebook pages, email or e-newsletters, and online discussion forums (Tromble, 2016). Though Twitter is not as widely used as Facebook, it has become a very important tool for politicians and political journalists and is also widely used by young people as a source of political news (Davis, Bacha and Just, 2016). One of the results of the growing use of Twitter in the political sphere is "a new kind of competition on the political scene, with many new and non-traditional political agents" (Nilsson and Carlsson, 2014, p. 668) using new communication strategies in competition with traditional political actors and communication strategies. This can result in politicians adopting populist approaches in an attempt to create links between campaigns and online audiences. This approach fits the social media logic of popularity and connectivity as the need to appear authentic is part of

the affordances of digital social networking technologies. In that sense, political activity on social media is described by some scholars as being an exercise in marketing (Dumetrica, 2014; Nilsson and Carlsson, 2014).

Some scholars suggest that Twitter, due to its relatively low cost and ease of use, represents an opportunity for many different and previously underrepresented groups to be involved in the political process (Halberstam and Knight, 2016; Raynauld and Greenberg, 2014). For example, movements like the #arabSpring and #occupy showed how Twitter can be useful to mobilize populations previously unable or unwilling to be politically active (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2014). Should these trends continue, scholars point out that Twitter can help address patterns of unequal political engagement (Xenos et al., 2014). However, other scholars suggest that Twitter simply reinforces traditional communication inequalities. Twitter affords a broadcast style of communication, employed in service of political (and other) marketing (Hemsley, Stromer-Galley, Semaan and Tanupabrungrun, 2017), and many “Netizens are still using Twitter mostly as a digital bullhorn to broadcast political information and opinion” (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2014). Some evidence suggests that people exposed to information on sites like Twitter, in contrast to traditional media, may be more likely to be ideologically segregated, and disproportionately exposed to tweets confirming existing points of view (Halberstam and Knight, 2016). To address the question of whether Twitter provided a platform for diverse issues to be heard during election time in Canada, we thus scraped the most popular hashtags related to the most recent Canadian Federal election. Focusing on the tweets that were most shared allowed us to understand whether the affordances of Twitter actually made a difference in terms of a broader political conversation for diverse citizens during the week prior to the election.

Method

the 2015 Canadian federal election. The election saw an incumbent Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) challenged by three other political parties. The Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), long thought to be the natural governing party of the country (Marland, Lewis and Flanagan, 2017), but which experienced an historic defeat in the 2011 election when the federal New Democratic Party (NDP), long the third party in the national race, rode an “Orange Wave” to become the official opposition party (Ballingall, 2017). Growing prominence of the Green Party of Canada (GPC), particularly in the west, created fears of a vote split, since the LPC would be the most center-left party. The NDP was seen as slightly left of the LPC, and the GPC was considered to be the most left-leaning party, despite a relatively conservative fiscal policy, due to its views on environmental stewardship.

The election was called in August 2015, early in Canadian terms, leaving more than 70 campaign days. Many suspected a two-way race between the NDP and CPC, however, the LPC ended up strong, with its leader, Justin Trudeau, son of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau leading the party to a majority government and ending 12 years of Conservative rule. This occurred despite the fact that Trudeau at 42 was portrayed by his opponents as too young and thus “not ready” to become prime minister.

data collection. This study relied on the affordances of Twitter hashtags for creating and maintaining discourse communities centered on a certain topic (Chang, 2010; Peters et. al., 2011; Brock, 2012). We used hashtags to identify and collect the most relevant and influential Twitter content related to the election, choosing the two most widely used election-related hashtags: #elxn and #cdnpoli. #Elxn42 was chosen because it was the most reported election-related hashtag on traditional media, meaning that it was a highly-promoted hashtag on mainstream or traditional media. This use of #elxn42 on print and broadcast news coverage means that

potentially a large and diverse group of Twitter users would know to follow the hashtag to see election related tweets. #Cdnpoli was chosen since it was the hashtag researched by Small in 2011, and also because it is the most popular general-purpose Canadian political hashtag. These two hashtags helped us to find popular political election related information on Twitter.

Following Tromble (2014), each tweet was the unit of analysis for data. Drawing from the work of Lachlan, Spence, Lin, Najarian and Del Greco (2016), we used Tweet Archivist, which taps into the Twitter streaming firehose, to grab all content we were permitted to scrape according to the Twitter API beginning September 21, 2015, and ending a day after the Canadian federal election (October 20, 2015). At the end of the month, we had scraped 1,264,276 Twitter posts, which we filtered to find the most influential content, by considering total in-degree connections, or total mentions and retweets.

Though every Twitter user has equal ability to post a message, that does not mean that every message has the same likelihood of being seen by others. An influential user of a social network has an outsized influence and is able to spread messages more widely than others (Dubois and Gaffney, 2014). An influential tweet related to a particular hashtag is more likely to be seen by a larger audience, and has a greater potential to inform or influence a larger number of people. For example, a study by Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner and Welp (2011) showed the number of party mentions during the 2009 German election accurately predicted the result of the election. For that reason, we filtered tweets by influence to focus on the most popular election-related messages during the week before the election, the week when most citizens are making final voting decisions. To determine influence in our dataset, we followed Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, and Gummadi (2010), who showed influence is a function of the number of retweets and @mentions a user receives. We calculated influence in #elxn42 and #cdnpoli tweets

by identifying the tweets with the highest number of mentions and retweets, that is to say, the tweets from accounts that were @-mentioned or retweeted the most frequently in the larger sample. We narrowed our sample to only the Twitter accounts receiving the highest number of mentions and retweets, leaving us with 52,093 tweets. Next, we used simple skip-interval random sampling, taking every tenth tweet, and conducting a detailed human-coded content analysis of the sample, which amounted to 5,209 tweets. We chose to focus on the smaller sample and human analysis because the brevity of tweets makes accurate machine analysis of context, diversity and tone very difficult. Our approach facilitated an understanding of the text beyond what frequency analysis and statistical keyword in context and concordance algorithms would be able to show us. This also allowed us to subtest for content appearing to be bot activity or hashtag hijacking, which we were also able to code when we found it. Once the content was collected and filtered, we asked the following research questions:

RQ 1: Was diversity represented among the most influential Twitter accounts during the 2015 Canadian election? Is there evidence that diverse groups had their messages travel?

RQ 2: What type of content sharing was most common among the most influential Twitter accounts during the election, and does this content represent diversity and democratic discussion?

RQ 3: Is the content of election related tweets best explained through a media logic, political logic or social media logic?

data analysis. Building on Lindgren, Hodson and Corbett (2017), and Hodson and Lindgren (2017), we coded the tweet sample according to the following categories:

- *topic area* - the main topic of the tweet based on election-related issues such as abortion, education, economy, immigration, political strategy, voting-related (where to vote, information on advanced polls, etc), and leadership, among others.
- *tweet type* - the nature of the tweet, for example, was it a call to action, link to a website, statement, insult, satire, and so on. For a complete list of topics, please see Appendix 1.
- *diversity* - which diverse groups were represented by the tweet, for example women, the LGBTQ... community, immigrants, refugees, seniors, or others? For a complete list of groups, please see Appendix 2.
- *news type* - was the tweet hard news, soft news, fake news, or not news?
- *endorsement/critique* - was the tweet an endorsement or a critique of a political party or leader, and if so, what or who?

A random sample of coded items for this project was used to ensure intercoder reliability.

Cohen's kappa was 0.684.

Our codes and subcodes were developed both inductively and deductively. Deductive analysis built on work by Hodson and Lindgren (2017), which used a series of codes developed to understand different topics covered by the media during Canadian elections. However, this coding schema had to be modified to account for an analysis of diversity related content, which was not included in the original analysis of Canadian media. To modify and enhance our coding schema, two independent coders engaged in inductive coding of a 10% subsample of the total hand-coded tweets. They identified different topics of interest to diverse groups, and compared and contrasted results periodically throughout the inductive analysis, norming the codes and creating descriptive categories in the coding booklet as they worked through the subsample.

When both coders could independently agree on the categories for diversity-related topics, the full sample was coded for these variables.

Results

influence. The top 10 most mentioned and retweeted Twitter accounts using hashtags #elxn42 and #cdnpoli in the week preceding the 2015 Canadian federal election are shown in Table 1:

[Table 1 goes near here]

Seven of the top 10 retweeted Twitter accounts for #elxn42 and #cdnpoli in the week preceding the 2015 election were already influential outside of social media. Three of the top 10 were party leaders, one was the governing CPC's official account, and three were affiliated with major Canadian media outlets. All seven were majority voices, either through affiliation with mainstream media, or because they were Caucasian and male, as were party leaders.

The remaining three accounts are outliers as they do not have a clear influence outside of Twitter. A qualitative analysis of their posts evidence of political polarization in the content of what was tweeted yet it is impossible to tell who actually runs the accounts or whether they represent diverse voices.

Unlike the 2009 German election studied by Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner and Welp (2011), our data suggests retweets and mentions of a specific politician was not correlated with the final election results. In our sample, the incumbent CPC candidate Stephen Harper received the largest number of retweets and @-mentions, but lost the election to Trudeau who received the second largest number of retweets and @-mentions. However, this result can be better understood when the tone of the tweets is examined. Coding for critiques of the @-mentioned

leader versus endorsements reveals that most critiques were directed at Harper and the CPC, totaling 2,491 tweets combined (or almost half of our sample). They had 651 endorsements. In contrast, Trudeau and the LPC had 471 critiques directed at them, and 822 endorsements. This could be important as the liberal leader Trudeau ran on a platform that supported diversity, whereas the incumbent CPC leader Harper, ran on a platform that expressed much less diversity.

Overall, while Twitter provides a relatively low barrier to entry for individuals and groups interested in having their messages or issues heard during election time, the most influential messages still seem to reflect specific celebrity voices. This is further supported through an analysis of the most popular election-related topics, as discussed in the next section.

diverse voices. As Table 2 shows, 837 out of 5,209 tweets related to issues of concern to different diverse groups. Tweets relating to women's issues were most prevalent, followed by tweets related to the Muslim community, with these two groups making up 69% of all of diversity-related tweets. Tweets related to the Muslim community focused on the niqab debate, a prevalent election-related issue covered by traditional media outlets related to whether Muslim women could wear a niqab when applying for government services. Tweets related to women's issues also often related to the niqab debate. On the right, it was portrayed as an issue of women's independence, while on the left, it was one of women's choice. Other tweets related to women's issues discussed abortion and a woman's right to choose. In the context of CPC and pro-life candidates. It is important to note both that topics of interest to diverse groups were represented on Twitter, but also important to note that qualitative analysis of the tweets shows that the agenda of the most influential tweets was reflective of coverage in the mainstream media at the time. That is to say, the agenda setting and framing nature of media logic reinforced by influential voices played a role when the most popular tweets were examined.

[Table 2 near here]

popularity. 4,293 of the tweets in our sample were retweets, rather than @-mentions, meaning that the tweet was an amplification of an existing message rather than an original tweet that mentioned one of our top 10 influential accounts. This shows the potential challenge diverse groups may face when trying to use Twitter to get their messages out. Simply put, a tweet originating from an influential account is more likely to be shared by others than an original tweet. To determine whether sharing on Twitter could be considered democratic discussion, we followed Bergie and Hodson (2015) to check for evidence of Twitter users asking non-rhetorical questions, or participating in dialogic tweeting, in which they would discuss an issue or idea over a series of posts. We only found a total of 370 tweets in the sample, or less than 1% which were either posing a question or participating in ongoing dialogue. In contrast, almost 20% of the sample 1,027 posts represented a call to action. Most of these were a call to vote for a specific candidate or party, a general call to vote in the election, a call to vote against a specific candidate or party, or a call to attend an event, rally, or debate.

The top 10 hashtags used (outside of #cdnpoli and #elxn42) were cpc (370 times); yqr (280 times); bcpoli (224 times); realchange (223 times); onpoli (197 times); ndp (186 times); lpc (168 times); topoli (120 times); abpoli (108 times); and qcpoli (106 times) (See Figure 1). All other hashtags were used less than 100 times each. In this list, #yqr is the hashtag for Regina, Saskatchewan as it refers to the Regina airport code. #bcpoli, #onpoli, #topoli, #abpoli, and #qcpoli are hashtags used to refer to regional or provincial political related tweets in British Columbia, Ontario, Toronto, Alberta and Quebec, respectively. Cpc, lpc, and ndp refer to the

specific political parties. Finally, #realchange refers to the hashtag associated with the LPC brand messaging.

[Insert Figure 1 near here]

Despite frequent regional hashtagging, the sample's content focused on national rather than regionally relevant issues or political figures. Table 3 shows the top five most prevalent topics. These top five made up 69% of the sample, or 3,636 tweets. The predominant topic was political strategy with 1,083 tweets. Of these, the most common categories for political strategy related tweets were amplifications about what leaders were doing on the campaign trail, such as the following post:

“RT @CPAC_TV: Coming up in the next hour we expect to hear from @pmharper and @JustinTrudeau live on-air and online. #cdnpoli #elxn42.”

[Table 3 near here]

Diversity-related was the second most prevalent topic in the sample with 837 tweets. These include each of the categories seen in Table 2, and generally tended to reflect diverse discourses that were prevalent in offline media sources during the pre-election time period. Examples include the following tweets:

“RT @Can_ada: Over 500 Canadian academics condemn Conservatives' "politics of hate" <http://t.co/Q5gUV2av4i>#cdnpoli #elxn42”

which links to a story from the National Observer, a Vancouver, British Columbia based left leaning news website, which discusses a dominant news story about Conservative politicians labelling Muslim customs as “barbaric cultural practices” or:

“Daycare dilemma & unreasonable sacrifice!<http://t.co/qxGdoYwnGW>#elxn42 #Cdnpoli #CPC #nspoli @CBCNews @CTV @legant66

which links to an article in the Toronto Star about the rising costs of daycare, interviewing working mothers.

Voting-related was the third most prevalent topic in the sample with 777 tweets. These mostly included call-to-action and get-out-the vote strategies, such as in the following post: “RT @ThomasMulcair: There is a better choice. Cleaning up Ottawa — once and for all — is just one vote away. #ImVotingNDP #elxn42.”

Leadership was a theme in 770 tweets. These included 452 critiques of incumbent candidate and CPC leader Harper, 83 critiques of LPC leader Trudeau, and 12 critiques of federal NDP leader Thomas Mulcair. Also in this category were 122 endorsements for either Trudeau or the LPC, 84 endorsements of either Harper or the CPC, 39 endorsements of either Mulcair or the NDP, and one endorsement of GPC leader Elizabeth May. Integrity was a dominant topic in 690 tweets. 470 of these were critiques of Harper or the CPC, 135 were critiques of Trudeau or the LPC and 11 were critiques of Mulcair or the NDP. Government spending/taxes/deficits was the only top-five topic related to election-policy issues. This category lagged far behind the others at 316 total tweets, or 6%, of our sample. Of these, most were amplifications of statements made about government spending such as the post below: “RT @JustinTrudeau: Harper’s game show stunts don’t change the fact our plan is the most generous for Canadians”.

Analysis

not a level playing field. In the case of Twitter use during the Canadian election, and despite the fact that a large number of Canadians from all walks of life have equal access to the

platform, not all voices are equally influential, meaning some voices spread further than others. Rather than specific messages being amplified because of content, our data suggests that it is individual celebrity users who are more likely to have their messages retweeted on the platform. These findings support the growing body of work which views Twitter as a broadcast medium tending to offer some users, but not others, a mouthpiece to reach a large audience. Additionally, when influential users such as politicians tweet, we do not see them engaging in dialogic behavior, such as using @-mentions to respond to questions or to engage with constituents. Instead, they are primarily making statements and announcements amplified by their base. Our data, like Vergeer and Hermans (2013), supports the normalization hypothesis. In the past, Twitter may have functioned to level the communicative playing field between politicians and diverse or underrepresented groups, however, now it seems to be supporting a hierarchy where the powerful or established have greater amplification than others.

The popularity of the hashtag #realchange among the most influential #cdnpoli and #elxn42 tweet sample is evidence of political branding at work. “Real change” was a main brand message of the LPC during the election campaign. “Real change” is a simple and direct message well-suited to social media logic since it is a clear straightforward hashtag easily spread by others. In the case of the 2015 Canadian federal election, this tactic seems to have worked well as the hashtag was the fourth most popular in our sample. Similarly, shortening Conservative Party of Canada to #cpc also represents a type of political branding that is well-suited to social media logic. Communication tactics such as hashtag creation and slogans like “real change” are commonly used in commercial branding, but here, confirming work by Marland, Lewis and Flanagan (2017) our data shows these tactics used in political messaging. This suggests

campaign tweeting is more an exercise in marketing (Dumetricka, 2014) than in political discourse.

The most influential tweeters during the election also developed a personal brand. Like in the 2010 Ottawa municipal election (Raynauld and Greenberg, 2014), journalists and politicians dominated the list of the most influential tweeters leading up to the federal election. The relatively low number of policy-related tweets in our sample suggests that a media logic, rather than a political logic, is at play. Were the messages influenced by a political logic, we would expect to see more content in our sample influenced by political needs or priorities (Takens, Van Atteveldt, van Hoof and Kleinnijenhuis, 2013). Instead the data suggests that the media logic of #elxn42 and #cdnpoli election news on Twitter is driven by popularity (branding) rather than policy, and fits a media logic driven by media voices that are influential outside of Twitter. The most popular topic, that we've coded political strategy, actually is less about strategic choices and instead mainly relates to retweets of events and appearances made by party leaders. This suggests a celebrity-focused media logic, and a tight control of political branding centered around a strong leadership figure. The presence and behavior of influencers also supports a social media logic extending beyond the entertainment frame with evidence of popularity, connectivity, and programmability.

the social media logic of twitter and political news. There is a clear social media logic which can be seen in our sample of election-related tweets. The most retweeted content is not retweeted based on a key topic or idea, but rather because it comes from influential users, demonstrating the logic of popularity. Most of the top 10 influencers were popular in Canada outside of Twitter, and they bring that popularity to the platform to influence or frame the election debate. In that sense, #cdnpoli and #elxn42 serve as digital bullhorns (Raynauld and

Greenberg, 2014) for selected individuals. This occurs irrespective of the political issue or idea being discussed. Importantly, popularity in terms of social media logic cannot be determined by number of mentions alone. Unlike previous research (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner and Welp, 2011), our data suggests the number of tweets in our sample was not correlated with a win on election day. Instead, both the number of tweets and the number of endorsements or critiques offered a more accurate picture.

Connectivity is evident in our #elxn42 and #cdnpoli election sample, with top hashtags showing a large number of influencers using region-specific hashtags. This suggests people were tweeting from those regions, or that they cared about those regions. However, most of the tweets had to do with national political leaders, rather than regional members of parliament showing that in a social media logic of connectivity, smaller voices in interconnected regions may get drowned out by popular national (or international) voices. In this case, the presence of regional hashtags in the datasets shows how interconnected different regions of the country are on Twitter. On the other hand, tweets with regional hashtags are not necessarily regionally specific information, confirming the findings of previous studies showing how national news travels farther than local news during elections (Hodson and Lindgren, 2017). It appears regional hashtags are employed to garner audience engagement across a large country (Revers, 2014). They are a tactic used to enable political messaging to conform to a social media logic of connectivity, rather than being used to start a discussion as seen in Small (2011) or Bergie and Hodson (2015).

Programmability by definition is not transparent, and it is difficult to know through a scrape of Twitter posts how many of the trending topics and influential tweets became popular as a result of algorithms encoded into the Twitter platform. In 2014, Twitter introduced a feature

that put recommended tweets into users' timelines. For the first time, this exposed people to content from users they did not necessarily know, meaning that a paid tweet could get greater reach than a non-paid tweet (Newberry, 2017). While we don't have data on how much money political parties spent on sponsored social media posts during the election, there is evidence each major political party spent money on online advertising which includes recommended posts on Twitter (Ditchburn, 2015). In this case, programmability would have resulted in posts from political parties or other large organizations appearing in more feeds than any posts from, for example, marginalized political actors. Combined with datafication, this means people who saw a recommended post in their feed may have been targeted specifically via the content of their previous posts, leading to the possibility of additional political, cultural and identity polarization during the week prior to the elections (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley and Matsa, 2014; Dvir-Gvirsman, 2017).

diversity in election discourses. Representation of diverse groups and their interests during an election time matters, both for ensuring diverse groups are engaged politically, and to ensure diverse groups' issues of concern are kept on elected politicians' radar (Harrell and Stolle, 2010; Minta and Sinclair-Chapman, 2013). However, it is not enough that discourses related to diversity and diverse groups are out there somewhere on social media. Indeed, they must be available and seen by a large number of people to move from margins into the mainstream. Our data showed issues meaningful to diverse groups among the influential tweets for #elxn42 and #cdnpoli, however, they were framed through the lens of the influencers who shared them. Identified issues tended to be within the boundaries of an "acceptable level of difference" as described by Durose, Richardson, Combs, Eason and Gains, 2012.

Canada is one of the most active nations on social media (Maloney, 2017). It is also a nation that prides itself on diversity (Wood and Gilbert, 2005). With a large number of users comes a greater likelihood of homogeneity and a few dominant ideas/voices within the #elxn42/#cdnpoli hashtag community (Zerback and Fawai, 2017) This may be what is occurring among the most influential tweets for #cdnpoli and #elxn42. The most popular tweets tend to repeat what dominant or influential voices have already tweeted. There is little dialogue or deliberation, and finally, a main theme is events or stories that have been present in news coverage outside of Twitter. Despite this, there seem to be little evidence of filter bubbles or echo chambers in the most popular election related tweets. Perhaps due to Canada's unique identity as a multicultural nation, issues that were important to diverse groups were granted a relatively large amount of attention among influential tweeters. In addition, topics were of interest to a wide range of diverse groups including women, Muslim Canadians, Indigenous Canadians, the LGBT+ community, Canadians with disabilities, and several others. This finding lends support to the research that suggests that fears of echo chambers or filter bubbles are overblown. In other words, distinct groups are neither being excluded from certain content via filter bubbles nor otherwise choosing not to engage with certain content via echo chambers. Instead, there seems to be an element of regular run-of-the-mill media logic at play. The most influential voices covering the most dramatic topics are more likely to spread far on Twitter, just as they are more likely to be covered on television or in newspapers.

Moving towards the next election in Canada, future research could track influential voices to see if the same influencers are present, or whether new influential voices emerge, and if so, whether they represent diverse groups. Additionally, building on this research, future research of election discourses on Twitter could pursue the issue of trending topics across different media

by conducting a topic analysis of both traditional media election coverage and cross-referencing that with the topics on Twitter to see if any statistically significant relationship exists. With respect to diversity in Twitter election coverage, it would also be interesting to analyze the long tail of Twitter. While it is important to understand the content that spreads the farthest, an analysis of the topics covered by less influential accounts would show if there is a difference between the content that is retweeted less frequently and spreads less far when compared with the highly mentioned or retweeted content. Such an analysis could illuminate the role of smaller communities and micro-influencers in discourses related to diversity.

Conclusion

Social media platforms like Twitter were once thought to level the playing field with respect to political communication, however increasingly these accounts, like the more traditional broadcast forms of communication seem most effective at spreading influential voices. We examined the most popular tweets in Canada during the 2015 Federal election, and our analysis showed that while diverse issues and topics were given a large amount of attention on Twitter (as measured by retweets and @-mentions), there were relatively few key influencers and the topics tended to be framed and shaped by dominant media discourses. Our analysis also suggests that rather than being driven by a political logic, the dominant logics guiding political coverage on Twitter during the 2015 Canadian election are media and social media logics. That is to say branding, drama, personalization, popularity, and connectivity are clearly influential at driving which topics, including which diversity-related topics, spread on Twitter.

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Appendix 1: Topic Coding List

Story Topic
Abortion
Agriculture
Crime/prisons/safety
Defence
Diversity/Multiculturalism*(<i>combine with Immigration for analysis purposes</i>)
Economy/jobs
Education
Election results/winners/losers
Energy/oil sands/pipeline
Environment
Federal/provincial relations
Federal relations with cities
Foreign Affairs
Gay rights
Government spending/taxes/deficits
Gun registry
Health
Immigration*(<i>combine with Diversity/Multiculturalism for analysis purposes</i>)
Indigenous issues
Integrity
Leadership
Marijuana
Minority/coalition government
N/A
Open government
Opinion polls
Other
Pensions/seniors issues
Political strategy
Poverty/minimum wage
Refugees
Social programs/childcare

Terrorism
Trade policy/TPP/industry compensation
Transport
Voting-related news

Appendix 2: Diversity Coding List

Diverse Representation
Black Canadians/Black Lives Matter
Immigration (Non-Muslim)
Muslim
Refugees
Indigenous Issues
Jewish Community
Other Ethnic or Cultural Groups
LGB- L
LGB - B
LGB - G
Transsexual/Transgendered
Mental Health
Physical Disabilities
Poverty
Seniors
Women
N/A

Table 1: Top 10 Twitter Influencers for 2015 Canadian Federal Election				
Twitter ID	Name	Description	RTs & @mentions	followers
@pmharper	Stephen Harper	CPC Leader, incumbent	12,593	1.23M
@JustinTrudeau	Justin Trudeau	LPC leader	11,405	3.87M
@stephenlautens	Stephen Lautens	Canadian journalist	7,399	15.8K
@ThomasMulcair	Thomas Mulcair	NDP leader	4,796	289K
@CPC_HQ	Conservative Party of Canada	Twitter account of the CPC	4668	120K
@CBCNews	CBC News	CBC News (Broadcaster)	4,627	2.5M
@PatOndabak	Name not given	Account suspended	4,440	unknown
@Berg69	Name not given	Unknown	4,313	19.1K
@Can_ada	Name not given	Unknown	4,102	15.3K
@globeandmail	Globe and Mail	A national daily newspaper	3,697	1.67M

Table 2: Representation of Diversity	
Representation of Diversity	Tweets
LGBTQ Issues	7
Physical Disabilities/Mental Health	15
Other Ethnic or Cultural Group	33
Refugee Issues/Immigration	51
Poverty and Seniors Issues	70
Indigenous Issues	77
Muslim Issues	241
Women's Issues	343
Total	837

Table 3: Most Popular Topics	
Topic	Tweets
Political Strategy	1,083
Diversity Related	837
Voting Related	777
Leadership	770
Integrity	690