Colombian Journalists on Twitter:
Opinions, Gatekeeping, and Transparency
in Political Coverage

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This article examines how the 100 most followed Colombian journalists on Twitter cover a controversial politician, former president Alvaro Uribe. Utilizing a social media analysis platform that applies a supervised-machine algorithm along with manual content analysis, this study shows that journalists not only negatively evaluated Uribe's comeback to the Colombian political arena but also profusely offered opinions about the politician on Twitter, following historical patterns that entangle journalism and politics in the Colombian context. It also reveals that journalists who work for elite-traditional media tend to be more in accord with some journalistic norms than nonelite reporters. The most followed journalists on Twitter seem to understand the new dynamic of social media as they have moved away from their traditional position by linking external media, and not only their own outlets, in their tweets. Finally, elite reporters offer more transparency than their nonelite counterparts.

Keywords: Colombia, journalists, journalistic practices, international communication, journalism, Latin America, politics, Twitter

Journalists have incorporated the use of social media such as Twitter into their daily practices for various reasons. Researchers have found that U.S. journalists use this microblogging system predominantly to search for stories, find sources, disseminate information, quote public officials, and crowdsource opinions to solve problems (Broersma & Graham, 2013). Sharing information and reporting news, two of the main reasons people use this microblogging system, directly concern journalism (Hermida, 2010). At the same time, the interaction between politicians, experts, citizens, and journalists on Twitter has transformed this social network into a space for publicly negotiating political issues (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013). Twitter's implementation in newsrooms has spurred scholars to explore whether the participation of journalists in these open systems empowers or weakens journalism as a

profession. Particularly, researchers from the United States and Europe have examined how journalists make use of tools such blogs and social media according to their norms and professional standards (Belair-Gagnon, 2015; Ekdale, Singer, Tully, & Harmsen, 2015; Singer, 2005). This line of research examines how social media are undermining or contributing to core journalistic values such as objectivity, accountability, transparency, and veracity (see, e.g., Artwick, 2013; Lasorsa, 2012; Verweij, 2012).

Building on this previous work, the present study seeks to understand how journalists cover former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe on Twitter. At the same time, it sheds light on how journalists incorporate social media in their profession, and how this interaction changes or preserves established journalistic practices due to that interaction. The research is the first to seriously analyze the way Colombian journalists are using Twitter. By selecting the top 100 most followed accounts, this article offers a comprehensive and systematic examination of how journalists are handling controversial political subjects and information in open network systems such as Twitter.

As a politician, Alvaro Uribe is known for his war against guerrillas and for his security policies that transformed politics in Colombia during his two four-year terms in office, which ended in 2006 and 2010, respectively (Uribe, 2012). He is one of the most controversial and *followed* politicians on Twitter in Colombia. He has gathered 4.6 million followers and has posted more than 53,000 tweets. He has been using the microblogging system as his "little newspaper" to spread his political ideas and attack his opponents, especially the reelected Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos (Semana Nación, 2012). Twitter seems to fit Uribe's political style and personality because the platform allows him to share ideas, opinions, and rumors and unleash political attacks at a fast pace without mass media intervention (Rey, 2010).

However, by scrutinizing how journalists cover Uribe on Twitter, the research also examines whether reporters have moved away from their traditional position as gatekeepers of information by interacting with other users, sharing their newsmaking process, and providing more transparency. The final goal of this project is to determine through content analysis whether Twitter is changing traditional journalistic practices.

Literature Review

Journalists play an active role in political discussions on social networks (Hawthorne, Houston, & McKinney, 2013; Lawrence, Molyneux, Coddington, & Holton, 2013; Ure & Parselis, 2013; Verweij, 2012). Colombia is no exception as its reporters have publicly engaged in intense debates unleashed by Uribe's political activity on Twitter. Colombian reporters and media organizations began to incorporate Twitter more eagerly into their newsmaking process when prominent sources started to spread opinions and information through that network. Reporters' and users' participation on Twitter grew particularly fast in the months before the 2010 presidential election (SEO Colombia, 2012).

Uribe and Journalists on Twitter

Alvaro Uribe became popular for creating political scenarios in which he entered in direct contact with communities. His weekly Government Community Councils, meetings that he held with local community leaders at town halls, set a dialogue between the central government, local authorities, and citizens (Camacho, 2010). However, through this participatory mechanism, Uribe imposed the political and media agenda, conveyed a self-image of a hard worker, and created a new social reality (Gómez, 2013). Knowing that this off-line populist political space would come to an end after his time in office, Uribe migrated to the online space of Twitter as a new platform to directly express his ideas without the intermediation of mass media.

In July 2009, as his second term drew to a close, the former president opened his Twitter account to establish a direct relationship with his followers. Back then, he was in the "middle of a crossroads," as he used to say—aiming for a third term after eight years in power (2002–2010). As the presidential election approached, Uribe began using social media to spread his political ideas, defend his legacy, and attack his detractors, mostly left-leaning politicians and journalists (Acebedo, 2011).

On February 27, 2010, the Colombian Constitutional Court declared a third presidential term unconstitutional. Because Uribe could not run for president that year, his political party chose Uribe's former minister of defense, Juan Manuel Santos, as his successor. Santos won his first election, in part thanks to Uribe's support. But once in power, President Santos distanced himself from his former leader on key issues such as foreign affairs and defense. Since then, Uribe has attacked Santos's administration through different outlets, often via Twitter (Rey, 2010). Especially, Santos's decision to open negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas enraged Uribe. The former president considered this negotiation an attack on his security policy of direct military confrontation with the FARC. On multiple occasions, Uribe shared his disapproval on Twitter using a confrontational tone.

Journalists have been following Uribe on Twitter not only as a valuable source of information but also as a form of engaging audiences, and participating in and influencing the political debate. Given this political background, this study explores how Colombian journalists covered Uribe from September 1, 2013, to September 1, 2015. At the same time, it analyzes the general sentiment and tone of 100 journalists' Twitter posts to shed light on their reporting.

RQ1a: *Analyzing the total number of tweets, to what extent do the 100 most followed Colombian journalists cover former president Alvaro Uribe on Twitter?*

RQ1b: *Analyzing the total number of tweets, what general automatic sentiment do journalists hold on their Twitter coverage of Uribe?*

RQ1c: *Analyzing the sample of tweets that was coded manually, what tone (positive/negative/neutral) do journalists use when mentioning Uribe?*

Normalization and Objectivity

Classical interpretations consider news to be framed—"a window on the world" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 1) that is socially constructed by newsmakers and news organizations. As a constructed reality, news "helps to constitute society as a shared social phenomenon, for in the process of describing an event, news defines and shapes that event" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 10). For a long time, journalists and media have influenced events and given meaning to news according to their norms. Even though this balance seems to have been altered by the irruption of audiences in the media space (Picard, 2010), journalists continue to approach new technologies according to their professional standards.

Studies on journalists' implementation of digital platforms such as blogs indicate that reporters try to use these tools within the context of their traditional practices and norms (Singer, 2005). This process is called *normalization*. Journalists normalize technology when they appropriate new tools according to existing professional values. For example, Broersma and Graham (2013) show that journalists use Twitter to disseminate information, search news sources, and get quotes from officials—all activities related to traditional journalistic practices. Using in-depth interviews, Reich (2013) found that newspaper journalists do not use technology at random, but in accordance with their traditional news reporting. Researchers have also gathered empirical evidence of this pattern on Twitter. Through a content analysis that examined 500 of the most followed journalists on Twitter, Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) concluded that reporters try to act in accord with norms when using this network system.

Simultaneously, journalists follow Twitter users' practices such as mingling facts and opinions, sharing their personal thoughts and beliefs—moving away from their traditional position, especially in the U.S. professional journalistic context (Bruno, 2011; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2013). Mixing facts and opinion through social media may be particularly easy in the Colombian media system, as politics and journalism have been closely tied throughout the country's history. Arroyave and Barrios (2012) noted that "the majority of Colombia presidents have been media professionals or owners, directors of newspapers or journalists in their previous careers" (p. 400). From 1886 to 1994, a total of 22 of the 28 Colombian presidents were media professionals or owners (Herrán, 1991). This trend continues today. For example, the current Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, used to be a co-owner of *El Tiempo*, one of the most influential newspapers in the country. His cousin, Francisco Santos, was the editor-in-chief of the same newspaper before he became vice president of Colombia. Once Francisco finished his term as vice president, he returned to journalism as a news director of RCN Radio.

Arroyave and Barrios (2012) also highlighted how the most influential media outlets have been affiliated with traditional political parties. For instance, *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo*, the main national newspapers, declared themselves liberal from the time of their foundation, not only in a philosophical sense but also as a way of avowing their affiliation with the Liberal Party. In the same vein, national television news stations used to belong to political families until recently, when TV channels were privatized. Elites close to local politics or the government continue to own regional media (Arroyave & Barrios, 2012). In many historical instances, media have covered information from a biased perspective, favoring political elites and economic groups with their information and compromising the independence of the press (Rincon, 2010). It is precisely because of the fuzzy line between journalism and politics in

Colombia that some media critics talk about a "revolving door" between these two domains of social activity. Frequently, journalists leave their profession to enter politics and politicians leave their office to accept media positions (Abad Faciolince et al., 2004).

Another factor that has weakened objectivity as a journalistic value in the Colombian setting is the country's tradition of mixing opinion, literature, and information. Some of the most prestigious journalists work not only as investigative reporters but also as columnists for various publications. Expressing opinions is seen as part of their profession and their watchdog activity within society. Likewise, there is a tradition of fiction writers working in newsrooms who combine literature and journalism to depict reality. Authors such as Jorge Zalamea and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez started their careers in newspapers before they became successful fiction writers. This trend has its roots in the careers of Latin American modernist writers such as José Martí and Rubén Darío, who created the *crónica* genre incorporating journalistic forms to advance their literary interests (Arroyave & Barrios, 2012; Reynolds, 2012).

Because journalism has historically been intertwined with politics, literature, and opinion writing in Colombia, this research project presents the following hypothesis:

H1:   *The top 100 most followed journalists will offer extensively more political opinions than facts on Twitter.*

Elite and Nonelite Media

There is also empirical evidence of differences between elite and nonelite journalists' behavior on Twitter. Lasorsa et al. (2012) concluded that nonelite journalists acted more like other Twitter users and were "more willing to deviate from traditional norms and practices" (p. 29) of journalism by freely posting their ideas and assuming more risk in their relationship with their audience and sources. At the same time, nontraditional reporters seem to take more advantage of online settings than their counterparts. For example, Lasorsa et al. (2012) found that the most notable names in journalism attracted more followers not because of their clever use of the interactive features of the platform, but because of their affiliation with prestigious media organizations. In this vein, some well-known journalists were not necessarily the most dynamic on social media. Elite journalists did not take full advantage of the microblog's capability, whereas nonelite journalists were more active as they were willing to take a more interactive role on Twitter. Therefore, the latter took more risks and were less attached to traditional norms than traditional media workers (Lasorsa et al., 2012).

Dialogue could be particularly difficult for more traditional reporters, who often want to maintain distance from their sources and audiences. Elite traditional media fear losing their reputation, credibility, and authority when participating in networked open spaces (Hermida, 2010). Some reporters perceive that retweeting a message may be considered a form of endorsement. In the same way, replying to posts has been understood as a form of reacting to a message and opening the path to an online conversation with audiences or sources. Belair-Gagnon (2015) has described the difficult process of adaptation for BBC News reporters to social media. Other researchers, analyzing UK newspapers, have discovered that

nonelite media such as tabloids and soft news outlets are more eager to quote celebrities' and nonfamous people's tweets in their articles because they tend to personalize news (Broersma & Graham, 2013).

Scholars have found that journalists not only merge facts and opinions on Twitter, but they also share or retweet information without verifying it (Bruno, 2011). Some less traditional journalists and news organizations justify this practice by explaining that newsmaking is not a fixed process. News "evolves" on Twitter as events occur, they argue. The "tweet first, verify later" strategy delegates the responsibility of getting the news right to the flow of information established in the interaction between users and technology (Bruno, 2011). However, as verification and accuracy are core values of journalism, this tendency to privilege immediacy over accuracy goes against some pillars of the profession.

Previous research has shown that nonelite journalists usually take more risks online and also express a more critical view in social networks, departing further from traditional norms than elite journalists; therefore, this article presents the following hypotheses:

H2:   *Nonelite journalists will express a more negative impression of Uribe than traditional news media journalists.*

H3:   *Nonelite journalists will offer more opinions and fewer facts on Twitter than elite news media journalists.*

H4:   *Nonelite journalists will interact more with their audience on Twitter by (a) replying and (b) retweeting more posts from users than elite media journalists.*

Gatekeeping

White (1950) was the first to explain how gatekeepers in the newsroom regulate the information flow using different criteria (Shoemaker, 1991). In a broader sense, gatekeeping has been defined as the "overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed" (Shoemaker, Eichholz, & Wrigley, 2001, p. 233). In practice, gatekeeping is the ability of journalists to decide what content is important to be published or broadcast and what is not (Shoemaker, 1991). Editors and content producers pass on or hold back information according to their norms. Gans (1979) goes further when he locates the newsmaking and the gatekeeping activity not at the individual level, but in the "process by which all parts, routines and arrangements of the organization are engaged for the creation of news" (Reese, 2009, p. 280).

Social media have been incorporated as a tool in newsrooms, but not without resistance and skepticism (Ekdale et al., 2015). There are signs of discomfort, change, and disruption in journalistic practices because of the influence of social media and users, but "enduring forces cultivate continuity and limit change" (Fenton 2010, p. 14). Journalists believe that core skills such as fact-checking, accessing exclusive sources, and verifying information set their work apart from other forms of online content produced by amateur users and bloggers (Fenton & Witschge, 2009). Reporters and traditional media tend

to emphasize those abilities to reestablish themselves as gatekeepers of the online information process (Belair-Gagnon, 2015).

Some researchers point out that the rise of digital technology and citizen participation is undermining the traditional gatekeeping model (Gillmor, 2006). Social media allow audiences to take partial control of the information process outside traditional outlets and, therefore, decide what news or events are relevant to communities. Others (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007) argue that the gatekeeper role has not disappeared online, because society needs journalists more than ever to act as sense-makers and fact-checkers of the information flow. Empirically, both claims find some evidence. Bachmann and Harlow (2012) find that traditional media and journalists are reacting to the digital challenge with a lack of willingness to open their media gates to users in their online projects. Artwick (2013) concludes that U.S. newspaper reporters approach their users with limited openness. Despite journalists' willingness to serve and even establish a dialogue with the general public, in the end they follow conventional patterns and tend to lecture their audiences. Artwick (2013) nevertheless contends that Twitter has the potential to become a space in which journalists could open their gates and empower users, especially when reporters respond to users' questions, clarify information, and invite them with @mentions to discuss ideas during live coverage and breaking news. Reporters do not ignore citizen voices on Twitter, but in most of their tweets they continue to use official sources and traditional quotes (Artwick, 2013). Hermida (2010) claims that journalists act as gatekeepers on Twitter when they filter and select posts that they consider worthy for their audience. Singer (2005) and Lasorsa et al. (2012) theorize that reporters show some flexibility in their gatekeeping position on Twitter when they link to information outside their own media organizations, and when they disseminate comments from users by retweeting or replaying to audience's posts. In fact, having access to an open network like Twitter seems to change some journalistic practices and opens new ways of interacting and producing information.

By asking the following set of questions, this research explores whether journalists depart from their traditional role as gatekeepers when they share external links (different from their own media) or retweet content and opinions from other users (Lasorsa, 2012) through this microblogging network:

RQ2a: *To what extent do journalists move away from their position as gatekeepers by linking to external information on their tweets?*

RQ2b: *To what extent do journalists move away from a gatekeeper position by retweeting and replying to messages from users?*

Because previous studies have shown that nontraditional journalists are more open to external influence in networked spaces, this study poses the following hypothesis:

H5:   *Nonelite journalists will link external information outside their own media space more than traditional journalists.*

Transparency

Given the immediacy of information on the Web, transparency has become a fair substitute for accuracy for some bloggers and users (Singer, 2005). On Twitter, journalists can provide transparency and accountability by discussing ideas with other users, sharing information about their newsmaking process, and talking about their personal lives (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Philips et al., 2009). By performing these online actions, journalists become more open to their audiences.

Karlsson (2010) distinguishes two ways to understand transparency from a journalistic perspective: *disclosure transparency*, in which "producers can be open about the way news is selected and produced," and *participatory transparency*, in which "users are invited to participate in different stages in the news production process" (pp. 537–538). Domingo and Heikkilä (2012) identify three key principles of media accountability. First, *actor transparency* entails journalists openly showing the public who they are, even by offering personal information. Second, *production transparency* helps to show how news is gathered and produced. Third, *responsiveness* facilitates criticism and feedback from the audience about the newsmaking process and production. Regarding actor transparency, Lasorsa (2012) notices that some journalists' tweets are related to their personal life. "Personalizing tweets" are divided between those that contain information about the journalist's job and those that contain a form of "lifecasting," conveying mundane information about the journalist's life (Lasorsa et al., 2012). Phillips (2010) and Lasorsa (2012) argue that non-job-related messages about journalists' personal lives ("lifecasting tweets") promote transparency by delivering information that "sheds light on the journalist behind the news" (Lasorsa, 2012, p. 408). Personal details shared by journalists seem crucial in the process of building transparency and, consequently, reinforcing users' trust.

Citizens sometimes are under the impression that journalists keep secrets or hide their work process because reporters and news organizations have not been interested in explaining what they do. This gap between the public and journalists creates misunderstandings and suspicion (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

Being transparent is a fundamental value for journalists on Twitter; therefore, the next set of research questions ask:

RQ3a: To what extent do Colombian journalists provide transparency by posting information about their newsmaking process?

RQ3b: To what extent do Colombian journalists provide transparency by sharing personal information on Twitter?

RQ3c: Is there a significant difference between elite and nonelite journalists when they share the newsmaking process and personal information?

Finally, gender seems to play an important role when investigating journalists' transparency on Twitter. Lasorsa (2012) found that women journalists tend to act with greater transparency than their male colleagues. In his study, women not only posted more personal information than men, but they also openly described their job processes, talked about their lives, and linked to external websites. Women's openness on Twitter is important for the future of journalism, because "transparency is emerging as a critical distinguishing feature of news media in the online environment" (Lasorsa, 2012, p. 413). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that:

H6:   *Women journalists will share more information about their news work process and their personal life on Twitter than their male counterparts.*

Method

This study used a mixed-methods approach. First, it used a social media analysis platform that applied a supervised machine-learning algorithm. The social analysis software used to collect and investigate general journalists' Twitter activity was Crimson Hexagon (CH), a group of social media analysis tools that has access to the Twitter "firehose," that is, all public messages posted on Twitter. Next, the research relied on traditional content analysis, a technique that looks for "the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 489).

To examine the most influential journalists' social media practices, the 100 most followed Colombian journalists were selected. They were chosen using the website Twitter-Colombia.com, which has one of the most comprehensive lists of Colombian journalists on Twitter. I compared and added to the list of Twitter-Colombia.com using other inclusive tools such as TwitterCounter.com and Twittercolombia.net.

Although "most followed" was a condition for selecting individual accounts, this study also considered journalists' professional relevance. Journalists who work for sport and entertainment sections were removed from the sample. Even though some of them are very popular on Twitter for their opinions regarding sport games or pop culture, their political views are rarely expressed. Hosts of entertainment television programs were also excluded because they usually post information and comments that are beyond the scope of this study.

Population and Sample

To collect the tweets of these 100 journalists, this study used CH to access the population of posts on the microblog about former president Uribe. The Pew Research Center (2012), which used the tool to study the 2012 U.S. presidential election coverage, highlights that the "software is able to analyze the textual content from millions of posts on social media platforms. Crimson Hexagon (CH) classifies online content by identifying statistical patterns in words" (p. 16). CH allows researchers to create data sets and analyze them in independent spaces called monitors. There are different types of monitors in CH. The most basic of them, called the Buzz Monitor, was used in this project to collect the data and understand the general automatic sentiment—positive, negative, or neutral—around an issue, a person, or an organization. It also provides cloud words and clusters. The software contains an algorithm that can be

trained to analyze content at the assertion level (Pew Research Center, 2012; Reis Mourao, 2014). The CH software provides settings that help researchers choose keywords, follow individual accounts, and select languages. Also, it targets the activity of users in specific regions. For this study, Spanish was chosen as the language. The keywords *Uribe* and *Uribe Velez* and the Twitter handle @alvarouribevel were used in the search for gathering the sample and the population of tweets from September 2013 to September 2015. Once all tweets that contained those words were collected, the tool allowed filtering the individual activity of the 100 journalists. After filters were applied, CH facilitated downloading the activity of each journalist into separate files, randomizing the data at the same time. Twenty randomized tweets for each journalist were chosen. Tweets were displayed in an Excel format to manually code the manifest content of communication. A total of 2,000 tweets were collected for the sample (20 for each journalist) and coded manually by human coders.

To identify journalists' information and opinions about Uribe, all tweets posted by the 100 most followed-Colombian journalists from September 1, 2013, to September 1, 2015, were gathered. This period encompassed several significant events: (1) Former president Uribe announced he would run for Congress; (2) congressional elections were held on March 9, 2014, and Uribe's party received more than 2 million votes and won 19 seats in the legislature; (3) contender Oscar Ivan Zuluaga was selected by Uribe's new political party as candidate for the 2014 presidential election against incumbent Santos; (4) the 2014 presidential election took place; and (5) as part of the peace talks in Havana, an agreement was reached between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas about the rebels' future political participation. Within this time span, an original data set of 34,413 tweets was collected. Irrelevant tweets were excluded using CH automatic functions.

Coding

The unit of analysis was the tweet. This study produced a reliable codebook that served as a guide to analyze manually a sample of tweets. Two trained coders with graduate education, Spanish native speakers, and knowledge about the Colombian context performed the content analysis. To ensure intercoder reliability, two pretests were performed on 60 tweets randomly selected from the sample until the coders reached an agreement of 95% or more on all variables (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000). Cohen's κ, a more conservative measure that takes into account the possibility of chance agreement between coders was also calculated. All the variables reached a minimum of .83 in this measurement.

Measures

To analyze the tweets posted by the 100 most followed journalists, this study considered the following variables.

Gender. Of the 100 journalists studied, 33 were women and 67 were men.

Type of media (elite vs. nonelite). To understand whether journalists from news media interact differently on Twitter, this study created two groups: elite and nonelite journalists. Journalists who work for the main Colombian national and regional news outlets were categorized as elite. Some examples of

elite media are national-regional newspapers (*El Espectador*, *El Tiempo*, *El Colombiano*, *El País, El Heraldo*) and major television channels and radio broadcasters (Carcacol Radio-TV, RCN Radio-TV, W Radio). Journalists who labor for news outlets such as native online media, nonprofit journalistic organizations, news aggregators, independent blogs, small news agencies, independent and alternative media (e.g., *La Silla Vacia.com*, *Noticias Uno*, *Verdad Abierta.com*) were categorized as nonelite (*k* = 0.857).

Sentiment (positive, negative, or neutral). The autosentiment analysis is the algorithm used by CH's Buzz Monitor. CH (2016) explains that "the algorithm utilizes a vast set of training posts (over 500,000) that were handlabeled as positive, negative or neutral" (para. 1). The software uses the set of

> these labeled posts to calculate the frequency distribution of each word, negated word, emoticon, etc. present in those documents across the positive, negative and neutral categories. These frequency distributions are then used to construct a model that analyzes each new post and classifies it by sentiment. (CH, 2016, para. 2)

The autosentiment analysis assigns a single sentiment to each post, producing a very accurate automatic coding of the general conversation among thousands of messages.

Type of post. In an *original post*, journalists write, produce, or illustrate this kind of post with their own words and output. A *retweet post* is usually identified by "You Retweeted" followed by @user and the user's original post. Retweets with comments can also be identified as "[message] . . . (via @user)." *At reply* usually happens when journalists respond to another user. The messages are identified by "@user," and then the answer from the journalist to the original post of the user (*k* = 1).

Link in the tweet. Coders identify the presence of a link inside the corpus of the tweet (*k* = 1). For *internal* and *external* links, coders previously identified each journalist's media organization. Then they determined by clicking in each link whether the URL belonged to the news media the journalist work for. If the link took users outside the journalist's media organization, it was considered an external link. If the link was from journalist's media, it was coded as an internal link.

Similarly, the content of tweets was examined and coded to determine whether it contained specific information.

Facts. These tweets contain data and plain information (*k* = 0.857).

Opinion. These tweets expressed journalists' points of view or their personal interpretation of a fact with related information. Some tweets had facts and opinions in the same post (*k* = 0.895).

Tone when mentioning Uribe (positive, negative, neutral). All remarks, words, graphics, or links that had a favorable outcome for former president Uribe were operationalized as positive. For example, on October 16, 2014, one journalist posted, "There is something that makes Colombian and Venezuelan presidents much alike: Without Uribe their political reality does not exist." This tweet was coded as positive in tone. All remarks, words, graphics, or links that criticized or represented an unfavorable

outcome for the former president were operationalized as negative. For instance, the following message posted on June 15, 2015, was coded as negative in tone: "I'm afraid. Whoever wins [the presidential election] today, Uribe will make us fall off a cliff by producing an institutional breakdown." Posts that did not offer any negative or positive outcome were classified as neutral. For instance, the following tweet posted on September 16, 2013, was categorized neutral: "Alvaro Uribe presented his list to the Senate" ($k = 0.836$).

Share information about the newsmaking process. This variable explored whether journalists explained in their tweets how they obtained, gathered, produced, or distributed information. This variable was coded when journalists described any part of the newsmaking process, including posting quotes from their sources during live programming or promoting in advance their content ($k = 0.849$).

Share personal information. This measurement examines whether journalists revealed any aspect of their personal lives, such as family ties, eating habits, hobbies, idols, or favorite movies or books ($k = 0.864$).

Results

RQ1a aimed to describe to what extent the 100 most followed Colombian journalists covered former president Uribe. According to the total number of tweets gathered using CH, the 100 journalists posted 34,413 messages about former Colombia president Alvaro Uribe from September 1, 2013, to September 1, 2015. The months with more activity in this two-year-span were May 2014 (12%; 4,099 posts), June 2014 (7.9%; 2,705 tweets), September 2014 (6.5%; 2,250 tweets), and September 2013 (6.2%; 2,140). The days with the highest volume of posts were September 16, 2014 (632 posts); June 15, 2014 (341 tweets); May 18, 2014 (306 posts); May 23, 2014 (249); and September 16, 2013 (248). The intensity of journalists' daily Twitter activity matches with breaking news and relevant events pertaining to Uribe that were aired or published by the media during those days.

For example, on September 17, 2014, the day with more circulated posts, leftist Senator Ivan Cepeda led a political debate inside the Colombian Congress against both paramilitarism and Uribe. On June 15, 2014, the second round of the general Colombian presidential election was held. On May 18, 2014, agenda-setter *Semana* magazine released a video allegedly showing contender Oscar Ivan Zuluaga—the candidate from Uribe's party in the presidential election—having a meeting with a political online advisor simply known as the "hacker," who supposedly had infiltrated the peace process. On September 16, 2013, Uribe announced his return to the political arena as a candidate for the Senate (see Figure 1). The 10 most prolific journalists were responsible for producing 51.7% of all volume.

RQ1b inquired about the general automatic sentiment of the coverage on Twitter. A social network analysis of the whole population of tweets (34,413) using CH revealed that 38% of the sentiment was coded negative (13,019 tweets), whereas only 11% of the sentiment was coded as positive (3,617 posts). From all tweets, 52% held neutral sentiment (17,753 tweets), according to the CH automatic algorithm (see Figure 2).
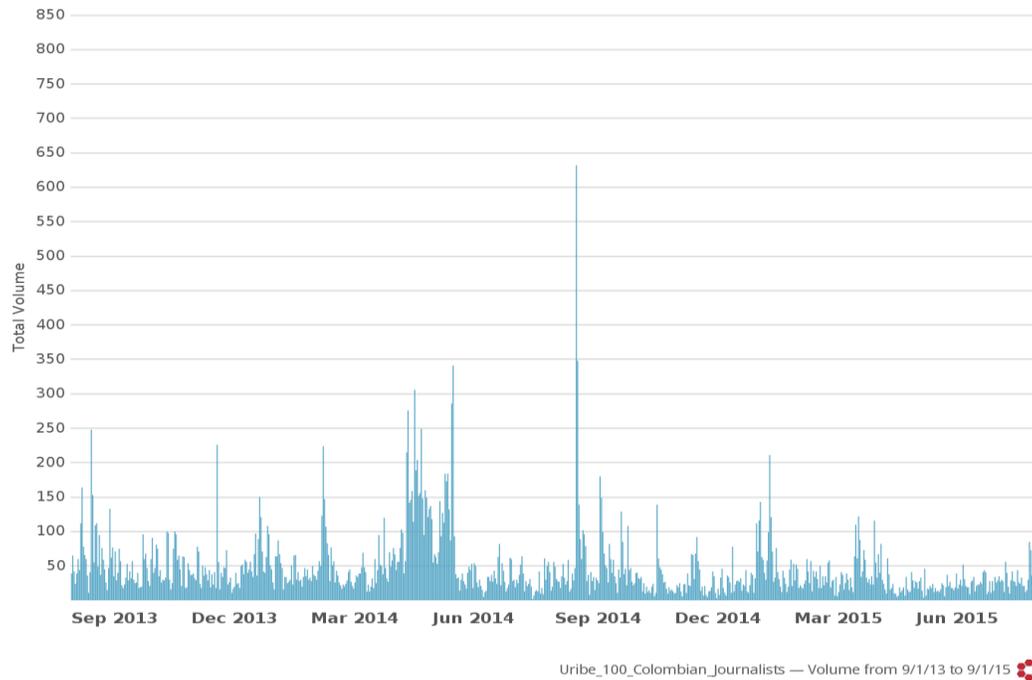
Figure 1. Volume of daily Twitter activity among the top 100 most followed journalists in Colombia, September 2013 to September 2015.

RQ1c looked into the tone journalists used when covering Uribe. A manual content analysis of the sample revealed that 67.2% of tweets held a negative tone toward Uribe, whereas 24.5% of posts had a positive tendency toward the former president. The rest of the tweets (8.3%) had a neutral impression of Uribe.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that journalists' tweets would contain significantly more political opinions than facts. Hypothesis 1 was supported. From the sample of 2,000 tweets (20 posts per journalist), 87% of the total posts contained opinions in their content. In comparison, only 21.3% of the sample was categorized to contained plain facts.
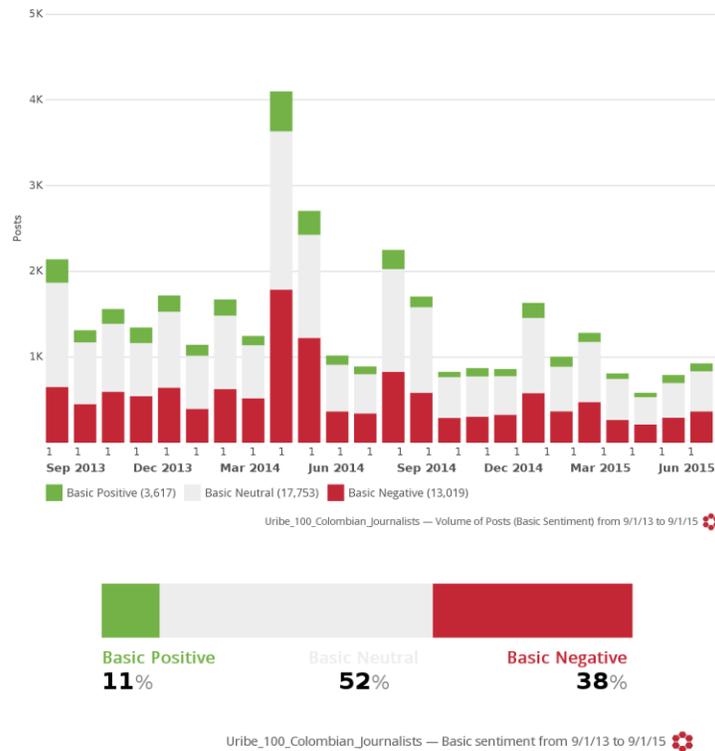
Figure 2. Monthly basic sentiment (positive, neutral or negative) of the Twitter activity among the top 100 most followed journalists in Colombia, September 2013 to September 2015.

Elite Versus Nonelite Journalists

Most of the journalists' tweets from the total sample held a negative impression of Uribe (67.2%). Hypothesis 2 posed that nonelite journalists would have a more negative tone toward Uribe, given their inclination to take more risks, than elite news media journalists. The hypothesis was supported. The type of media that the journalists work for is significantly related to these findings (see Table 1). Reporters who work for nonelite media have a more negative tone (72.7%) toward Uribe in their tweets than journalists who belong to elite media (63%), $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 33.785, p < .001$.

Table 1. Elite and Nonelite Media in the Evaluation of Uribe (Tone).

Evaluation of Uribe	Total	Elite media	Nonelite media
Negative	67.2% (1,394)	63% (721)	72.7% (623)
Positive	24.5% (491)	29.4% (336)	18.1% (155)
Neutral	8.3% (166)	7.6%% (87)	9.2% (79)

Note. $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 33.785, p < .001$.

Hypothesis 3, which proposed that nonelite journalists would offer more opinions on Twitter than their elite media counterparts, was also supported. The type of media plays an important role in this particular question. A cross-tabulation of the elite and nonelite media reveals that journalists from nonelite media share more opinions in regard to Uribe (92%) than their colleagues from traditional organizations (83%), $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 34.599$, $p < .001$. At the same time, elite media journalists included more facts overall in their tweets (27%) than their nonelite media colleagues (14%), $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 45.398$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2).

Table 2. Elite and Nonelite Media by Facts and Opinions.

Type of media	Elite media	Nonelite media	Total
Facts	26.6% (304)	14.2% (122)	21.3% (426)
Opinion	83.3% (953)	91.9% (788)	87% (1,741)

Note. Significant at $p < .001$. $N = 2,000$.

Most tweets posted by journalists mentioning Uribe were original posts (48%). Results showed that 39.1% of the total posts were retweets, and 12.9% were reply messages. Hypothesis 4 predicted that nonelite journalists would interact with users by retweeting and replying to messages more than elite journalists. This hypothesis was supported. A cross-tabulation analysis revealed a significant difference between the two groups of journalists. Nonelite journalists retweeted more posts (42%) than elite news media workers (37%). In the same way, nonelite reporters replied to more posts (14.6%) than their traditional counterparts (11.6%), $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 13.273$, $p < .01$.

When analyzing whom journalists retweeted and replied, there was a significant difference between the nonelite and elite groups. Elite journalists retweeted more posts from media companies (44%) than nonelite journalists (28%). Elite reporters also endorsed more tweets from officials and sources (18%) than nonelite reporters (12%). Conversely, nonelite journalists tended to retweet more posts from users (59%) than elite news media workers (38%), $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 33.700$, $p < .001$. A similar pattern emerged regarding their reply activity. Nontraditional journalists replied to more posts from regular users (70%) than elite reporters (46%). The difference was significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 2,000) = 14.580$, $p < .01$ (see Table 3).

Table 3. Elite and Nonelite Media by Original Posts, Retweets, and Replies.

Type of media	Elite media	Nonelite media	Total
Original post	51.5% (589)	43.4% (372)	48% (961)
Retweet	36.9% (422)	42% (360)	39.1% (782)
Reply	11.6% (133)	14.6% (125)	12.9% (258)

Note. Significant at $p < .01$. $N = 2,000$.

Gatekeeping

In addition to inquiring about how Colombian journalists covered former president Uribe on Twitter, this study aims to understand whether professionals attach themselves to their traditional role as gatekeepers and offer more transparency when tweeting about controversial political figures such as Uribe.

RQ2a asked whether reporters move away from a gatekeeper position by linking to external media information in their tweets. The results showed that 27% of all tweets from the sample contain external links. Among such tweets, almost two-thirds (63%) of the links pointed to information outside journalists' own media.

RQ2b asked to what extent journalists move away from their position as gatekeepers by retweeting or replying to posts from users. Of the total messages retweeted (39.1%), 48% were from other users, 37% from media companies and other journalists, and 15% from journalistic sources. Among the total number of replies, 58% were to other users, 24% to other sources, and 18% to media companies and other journalists.

In the same way, a cross-tabulation showed significant differences between nonelite and elite journalists when linking to information inside or outside their media organizations. As hypothesized (H5), nonelite journalists are more open to linking to information outside their own media (81%) than their elite counterparts (51%), $\chi^2(1, N = 2,000) = 49.655, p < .001$ (see Table 4).

Table 4. Elite and Nonelite Media by External Links and Own Media Links.

	Elite media	Nonelite media	Total
External links	51.2% (164)	81.4% (171)	63.2% (335)
Own media links	48.8% (156)	18.6% (39)	36.8% (195)

Note. Significant at $p < .001$. $N = 2,000$.

Transparency

RQ3a asked to what degree Colombian journalists provided transparency by sharing information about their newsmaking process on Twitter. Of all tweets from the sample, 17% share information about reporting activities and news elaboration. RQ3b inquired to what extent journalists provided transparency by sharing personal information. Results show that only 4.6% of the tweets offered personal details.

RQ3c inquired whether there was any significant difference between elite and nonelite journalists when sharing personal information and their newsmaking process. Significant differences were revealed in both areas. Elite news media journalists shared more information about their newsmaking process (20%) than their nonelite partners (12.7%), $\chi^2(1, N = 2,000) = 18.592, p < .001$. Traditional media workers also offered more personal information in their tweets (5.4%) than their nontraditional counterparts (3.6%), $\chi^2(1, N = 2,000) = 3.591, p > .05$; however, the result here was not statistically significant (see Table 5).

Table 5. Elite and Nonelite Media by Personal Information and the Newsmaking Process.

	Elite media	Nonelite media	Total
Personal information	5.4% (62)[+]	3.6% (31)[+]	4.6% (93)[+]
Newsmaking process	20% (229)[***]	12.7% (109)[***]	16.9% (338)[***]

[***] $p < .001$. [+] $p < .1$. $N = 2,000$.

Finally, this research hypothesized that women journalists would share more personal information (5.7%) than male journalists (4.1%). The results in this case are not significant, and hypothesis 6 is not supported, $\chi^2(1, N = 2,000) = 2.592, p > .05$.

Discussion

Former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe decided to return to the political arena as a senator to lead the opposition against the government in September 2013. Twitter has become the favorite platform to publicly debate political issues pertaining to Uribe. Since the end of his presidency in 2010, Uribe has actively used his Twitter account to contradict the current administration and to voice discontent about national and international policies. Colombian journalists not only cover Uribe as a source of information on Twitter; they also participate actively in the political debates about his public persona. More than 34,000 messages related to Uribe were posted in the two years since he announced his political comeback. Journalists' activity on Twitter reached its peak during breaking news and controversial events surrounding Uribe. Media agenda-setter *Semana* magazine contributed prominently to the discussion because of its coverage during the 2014 presidential campaign. The results show that journalists follow and react to media coverage on Twitter. The algorithmic analysis also found that journalists emphasized conflict and confrontation in the coverage of Uribe. For example, some of the most common words attached to Uribe were "Santos" (10%), "against" (5.1%), "FARC" (4.9%), and "peace" (4.7%), accentuating conflict on key political issues.

Maintaining the historical pattern of mixing politics with journalism and opinions with facts, the top 100 journalists on Twitter profusely expressed their opinion when mentioning the politician. A polarizing figure such as Uribe spurs posts with strong words and judgments. More than two-thirds of journalists' messages contain a negative impression of the former president (67.2%). They perceive Uribe's participation in politics as somehow damaging to the democratic process because it increases polarization.

As other researchers from the United States have found when analyzing the role of journalists on Twitter, those who belong to elite news organizations tend to act more in accord with journalistic norms and practices than reporters who work for nonelite organizations. Even though opinions and judgment are found in most of the tweets, this study finds that journalists from traditional media share their opinions less and have a less negative impression of Uribe than their counterparts from the nonelite media. Elite media journalists also tend to include more facts in their tweets (27%) than their nonelite media colleagues (14%).

Even though nonelite journalists seem more critical toward the establishment, they are more willing to interact with their audience by retweeting and replying to more posts from third parties than their more traditional counterparts. The fact that nonelite journalists endorsed and answered more posts from regular users than elite reporters indicates that the first group tended to be more inclusive of diverse voices in their coverage. At the same time, nonelite journalists are less inclined to endorse official journalistic sources than elite reporters, indicating a departure from traditional journalistic practices and norms.

The more conventional attitude of elite journalists could be interpreted from two different perspectives. On the one hand, they understand the responsibility of representing their media outlets and feel the constraints of their organizations. On the other hand, they have internalized some journalistic values and try to act according to those norms and practices. However, the overall percentage of opinion proved to be very high for both elite and nonelite journalists. This open expression of opinions on Twitter generates some tension among professionals and their audience, although it drives public debate and contributes to democracy.

An interesting finding is that elite reporters provided more transparency in their coverage of Uribe than nonelite journalists when they share their newsmaking process and personal information. Being more aware of their journalistic method, training, and routines, traditional reporters from mainstream news organizations are keen to show their audience the practices behind their newsmaking process. Elite journalists also tended to send advances of their news coverage to promote and generate expectation through social media about the final features produced for their media. Engaging audiences on social media and self-promotion seem to explain their willingness to be transparent about the newsmaking procedure.

Journalists' activity on Twitter reflects new journalistic practices online. Colombian journalists have understood, at least partially, the new dynamic of social media. Proof of this is that they have moved away from their traditional position as gatekeepers by adding external media links and information in their tweets. Not only did 27% of all tweets contain links, but two-thirds of those links took users outside journalists' own media system. This trend demonstrates that Colombian journalists seem to be willing to share relevant information even if it is found outside of their media space. Consequently, they do not conceive of Twitter as an exclusive platform to disseminate their own media work, but see it as a space to distribute and discuss the work of other media. By opening the gates to other outlets and platforms, journalists hope that users can benefit from a variety of sources.

Most tweets posted by journalists were original posts. Fewer of them were retweets or replies. Journalists continue to act as producers and have limited interaction with users. They consider their ideas to be more relevant to the communication process than those produced from their formal audience. Reporters seem to have difficulties endorsing other users' posts, especially on controversial topics such as politics.

This study could have easily concluded that journalists do not show enough transparency in their Twitter activity because they scarcely share their newsmaking process (17%) and personal information

(4.6%). However, further research is needed in this area to look at journalists' interactions on Twitter beyond the coverage of former president Uribe. Colombia's intimidating political context might limit the way journalists interact or share personal information with other users on this particular subject.

Two main differences between the Twitter activity of Colombian journalists and their U.S. counterparts can be advanced when comparing the results of this research with previous research that has been conducted specifically in a U.S. context (e.g., Lasorsa et al., 2012). The first difference is that Colombian journalists profusely offer political opinions on Twitter, given the historical twinning of politics and journalism in the country. Second, journalists more frequently share links and information from media competitors than U.S. reporters seem to do. Colombians distribute the work of their peers from other companies if they consider the information relevant to the public. Finally, given the violent historical context of the country, the political debate in Colombia has reached excessive levels of confrontation, negativity, polarization, and vehement language. In an exacerbated tone, former president Uribe contributes to a deeper political polarization on Twitter. Some journalists react and engage in the belligerent dynamic and do not contribute to the democratic debate.

Even though these findings shed light on the relationship between Colombian journalists, Twitter, and politics, this study has some limitations that need to be addressed. The first one has to do with the nature of the sample of journalists. Although this study carefully tracked and compared comprehensive lists of Colombian journalists on Twitter, there is no foolproof certainty that all reporters on Twitter were included and considered as part of the population. In the same way, this study mixed journalists who follow a neutral approach in their traditional coverage with columnists and analysts who provide their opinion as part of their daily job. The sample was large enough to counter this issue. Future research should provide a deeper look at this sampling by conducting at least 20 interviews with the most followed Colombian journalists to understand their journalistic practices from their point of view and in their own words. Also, it would be relevant to examine the relationship between politicians, journalists, and the public on Twitter to understand their influence on one another.

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