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Backchannel Chat: Peaks and Troughs in a Twitter Response to Three Televised Debates during the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum Campaign

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Abstract: This paper identifies the peaks and troughs in Twitter usage during three televised Scottish Independence Referendum debates in Autumn 2014 and identifies the topics that were the foci of such peaks and troughs. We observe that the issues that caught the most attention from the Twitter sample changed from debate to debate, suggesting that viewers were keen to discuss the question of independence from all sides of the question. We also note that the sample responded most strongly to "moments of political theatre" rather than thoughtful debate and that they chose to wait until breaks in the programme, such as advertisement breaks, vox pops and spin-room discussions, to tweet. While this paper is mostly a quantitative study, the final section offers an introduction to some of the qualitative analysis of the collected data currently being undertaken by the team.

Keywords: elections, referenda, Scotland, televised debates, Twitter

1. Introduction

Social-networking sites such as Twitter offer their users the potential to participate in public debate. Unlike television broadcasting or newspaper opinion columns, social media have low barriers to entry and offer the potential for collective involvement (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011). In recent years, television programmes have become popular topics for Twitter

discussions, often featuring in Twitter's trending topics lists. Twitter allows the conversations about television programmes that viewers have with those sitting in the same room to extend into cyberspace, allowing them to exchange opinions about plot and characters in a more public sphere. Unlike the original "water cooler" conversation, where viewers had to wait until the next day at work to share their opinions with others outside their close family circle, Twitter allows backchannel discussion in real time while the programme is happening. This can add a new dimension and pleasure to television watching (Harrington *et al.*, 2013). Television producers have started to encourage this discussion by establishing Twitter accounts for programmes and by advertising hashtags related to the programme at its start. Indeed, Twitter can even become part of the programme itself, incorporating viewer feedback and questions. Involving viewers in a programme through Twitter discussion can encourage real-time viewing rather than the use of time-shift technology, because only real-time viewing can guarantee that a Twitter community will be watching the programme at the same time as you. The same is true of television programmes relating to political issues, such as debates relating to elections or referenda. During such debates, social media allow people to react in real time to events on screen and to discuss political issues outside their immediate circle. Thus television watching is turned into a communal, social event, and social media becomes a site of rapid response to the events and arguments onscreen. Social media therefore allows viewers to interact and engage with onscreen events, offering opportunities for public comment, discussion and interpretation. Houston *et al.* (2013) suggest that, in fact, live-tweeting during a televised debate can enhance engagement with the debate content and may impact on the evaluation of the candidate. Anstead and O'Loughlin have coined the term "viewertariat" (2011) for this phenomenon, where viewers become more active and engaged through such media hybridity. It also allows campaigners to judge how well particular arguments and speakers were received and can be used strategically during the event by activists.

2. Twitter and Political Engagement[1]

Launched in 2006, Twitter is a micro-blogging service that allows users to post messages (tweets) of up to 140 characters in length. By September 2013, there were 15 million Twitter users in the UK (Curtis, 2013), although 40% of its users worldwide are "lurkers" who prefer only to read rather than send out tweets themselves (Holt, 2013). Twitter messages can be aimed directly at another Twitter user through the use of the @ symbol, can be "retweets" of other users' messages, or can be aimed at a more general audience through the use of hashtags (#). Thus Twitter can be used to conduct conversations or broadcast to individuals, groups or the general Twittersphere. Since its inception, Twitter has been an important forum for political debate between its users, although academic analyses of such debate have tended to focus on issues, citizen debates and elections (Mascaro & Goggins, 2012). In particular, Twitter makes an excellent tool for examining immediate audience response to televised debates on political issues and between politicians. Before social media, researchers investigating audience response to such debates were limited to focus groups and audience surveys – methods that have limited generalizability and were usually not

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[1] There is, of course, much academic debate surrounding the definition of concepts such as political engagement and participation, terms that are often used synonymously. In this paper, when using the word "engagement", we go beyond Dahlgren's (2006, p.24) notion of it being a subjective state of mind. Instead, it is used to denote some form of political "activity", in this case the sending of one or more tweets directly in response to events occurring during televised political debates.

undertaken in real time. Analysis of Twitter data enables researchers to increase the size of the data collected, to collect real-time responses, and also does not require researcher intervention or interaction with participants. Thus; there is a growing body of research analysing audience response to political televised debates through the use of Twitter. While much of this research has focused on American presidential elections (e.g., Mascaro & Goggins, 2012; Houston *et al.*, 2013), research has also been conducted into the response on Twitter during the 2010 UK general election (Newman, 2010), the Norwegian elections in 2011 (Kalsnes *et al.*, 2014), and, in a wider study, all three Scandinavian general elections in 2010 and 2011 (Moe & Larsson, 2013).

3. Aim of the Research

The overarching aim of this exploratory research was to develop an understanding of how Twitter is used as a vehicle for communication during televised political engagements. In order to do so, the following objectives were established: to identify the peaks and troughs in Twitter usage during the course of three debates, and to explore, using content analysis, the specific incidents and political/policy issues that generated the greatest and the least levels of discussion on Twitter.

4. The Scottish Independence Referendum and the Televised Debates

The most northerly country within the UK, Scotland, is politically represented in the UK Parliament in London, and, since 1999, has had limited self-government through the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. On 18 September 2014, the people of Scotland were asked the dichotomous Yes or No question, "Should Scotland be an independent country?". The campaign was dominated by two formal groups: the pro-independence Yes Scotland group, led by the Scottish National Party (SNP), with support from the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Socialist Party; and the pro-union Better Together group, with broad support from the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties. An added dimension to the referendum was the extension of the voting franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds throughout Scotland. The polling day saw an overall turnout of 84.6% of the electorate (the highest for any election or referendum in the UK since the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1918), with 55.3% voting against independence.

For the purposes of this research, tweets sent during three televised debates on the question of Scottish independence were collected and analysed. The debates were selected because of their timing (very close to the referendum itself), their live broadcast with no editing, and the stature of the participants. **Debate 1** (5 August 2014) was held at Glasgow's Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and was between Alex Salmond, Scottish Government First Minister and SNP leader, and Alistair Darling, a Labour Member of the UK Parliament (MP) and the Better Together chairman. The debate was broadcast between 20:00 and 22:00 British Summer Time (BST) on the commercial channel Scottish Television (STV). The debate was only shown in Scotland, although STV offered the possibility of watching the programme in real time via its online STV player to interested parties in the rest of the UK and beyond. The debate had an average audience of 765,000 viewers with a peak of 920,000 (*The Guardian*, 6 August 2014). In addition, half a million viewers attempted to watch the debate online, although many complained of problems as the STV player struggled to cope with demand. **Debate 2** (25 August 2014), again between Darling and Salmond, was held in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Art Gallery. It was broadcast on BBC Scotland between 20:30 and 22:00

BST (as BBC Scotland is a non-commercial channel the programme did not include advertising breaks, which meant that all three debates were actually of the same length). Viewers in the rest of the UK were able to watch the debate on BBC Two. The BBC Scotland programme attracted 843,000 viewers, a 37% share of the television audience in Scotland, while the BBC Two broadcast attracted 1.7 million viewers, overall a 6.8% share of the UK television audience (*The Guardian*, 26 August 2014). The programme was also simulcast on the Sky News and BBC News channels. **Debate 3** (2 September 2014) took place at the Edinburgh Assembly Rooms, and was broadcast on STV between 20:00 and 22:00 BST. The programme was simulcast on itvnews.com, as well as the STV website, and then repeated at 22:35 BST on STV's network partner ITV for the rest of the UK. This debate was different in format, with two teams of three participating in what was described as a "town hall debate". For Yes Scotland the team was: Nicola Sturgeon, an SNP Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) and Deputy Leader of the Scottish Government, Patrick Harvie MSP (Scottish Green Party co-convenor), and Elaine C. Smith, actor and political activist. For Better Together the team was: Douglas Alexander MP (Labour), Ruth Davidson MSP (Scottish Conservative leader) and Kezia Dugdale MSP (Labour). Both STV debates were moderated by STV's political editor Bernard Ponsonby, while the BBC debate was moderated by political journalist and broadcaster Glenn Campbell.

5. The Sample

Using software developed by a team led by Göker, a purposive sample of tweets was collected during the live broadcast of each of the three debates. While we would make no claims that, in demographic terms, our sample of tweeters is representative of the Scottish population as a whole, it is worthwhile noting that Sloan *et al.* (2013) established that, in the UK, the gender demographic of Twitter users mirrors that of the UK census within 0.1%, and that their geographic distribution is also in proportion to the population density of the UK. The sample was compiled in three ways. Firstly, every tweet containing the widely-used, politically-neutral hashtag #indyref, and/or those hashtags promoted by the debates' host broadcasters (i.e., #scotlanddecides and #bbcindyref) was collected. Secondly, every tweet geo-tagged as being sent from Scotland was collected. Thirdly, the sample was augmented by around 300 Twitter accounts, selected because of their owners' evident interest in Scottish politics and the referendum, with these accounts being sourced primarily from extant lists on Twitter (e.g., Scottish #indyref journos). Every tweet sent by these 300 accounts and every tweet that mentioned them was collected. From the resulting stream of tweets a filter was then used to remove tweets containing a large number of URLs (past experience has shown that these are likely to be spam). The number of tweets sent every minute during the debates was then counted in order to identify peaks and troughs in the Twitter conversation in the sample. During Debate 1, a total of 54,811 tweets were collected, with an average of 456.8 tweets per minute over the two hours. During Debate 2, 64,041 tweets were collected, with an average of 711.6 tweets per minute (over 90 minutes), and during Debate 3, 31,715 tweets were collected with an average of 264.3 tweets per minute over two hours. At the peak of Debate 2 (broadcast UK-wide), over 1,300 tweets were collected in one minute. Whilst Boyd *et al.* (2010) suggest very limited use of hashtags by Twitter users, so that hashtagged content makes up only a small subset of discussion online, we would suggest that there has been some considerable change in Twitter use since their research, particularly in relation to political debates. Indeed, more recent research in Australia and Norway indicates that political Twitter use peaks during televised debates and that the use of political

hashtags increases beyond the hard core of political Twitter users (Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Kalsnes *et al.*, 2014). It was perhaps unsurprising, then, to observe that both Better Together and Yes Scotland encouraged their followers to make use of the neutral hashtags discussed above, thus accessing voters outside their own committed supporters. Three members of the research team each independently watched all three debates, noting the topics discussed minute by minute. Comparisons were also made with other media outlets that blogged the debates in real time, such as the online site of *The Guardian* newspaper, in order to agree the timing of the topics under discussion.

5.1 Peaks and Troughs

The peaks and troughs of Twitter engagement amongst the project sample during the three debates were then analysed. Peaks were defined as the points in time where Twitter activity was at its highest during the debate, and troughs as the lowest points. For these definitions, we drew on the work of Elmer (2013), whose research into Twitter discussion during a televised debate in the 2008 Canadian federal election campaign produced charts that showed minute-by-minute activity in the Twittersphere and identified the onscreen moments that stimulated spikes in Twitter discussion. For each debate a general trend of gradual growth in the average number of tweets collected per minute was discerned, demonstrating that the sample became more engaged in tweeting about the debates as they progressed. This finding agreed with Kalsnes *et al.*'s 2014 study of televised election debates in Norway. However, it was also possible to identify a number of clear peaks and troughs in the sample's tweets, and the subjects under discussion at these points in the debate were noted. Overall, in Debate 1, the team identified seven peaks and five troughs in the sample's Twitter discussion (see Figure 1).
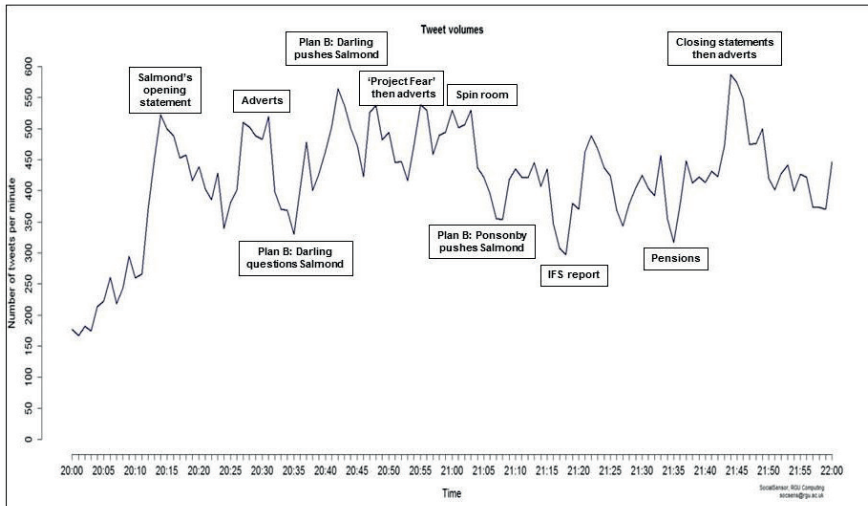

Figure 1: Peaks and Troughs in Twitter Discussion, Debate 1, 5 August 2014

The first peak came at 20:12 BST, during Salmond's opening statement. Salmond had won a toss and elected to speak first. There was no similar peak for Darling's opening statement. The next

peak instead came at 20:42 when Darling pushed Salmond hard on the question of a "Plan B" should currency union between Scotland and the rest of the UK prove impossible. This peak was rapidly followed by two further peaks, at 20:47 and 20:55, when Salmond questioned Darling about what he termed "Project Fear" (the negative approach to campaigning from Better Together), then pressed Darling to specify the extra powers that would be offered to Scotland in the event of a No vote, and then asked whether he agreed with UK Prime Minister David Cameron that Scotland could succeed as an independent country. A further two peaks came at 21:00 and 21:03, with a "spin room" discussion where the camera moved away from the two key debaters to hear the opinions of political commentators, and then questions from the audience on the subject of "Plan B". The final peak came at the end, after the closing statements. As far as troughs were concerned, the first came at 20:34 when Darling started to question Salmond on "Plan B", and the second at 21:07, when the moderator Bernard Ponsonby pushed Salmond on this subject again, suggesting that he was disrespecting the nation by refusing to answer. The third trough came at 21:18 when Salmond discussed a report from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), and the final two at 21:27 and 21:36 when there was discussion of pensions.
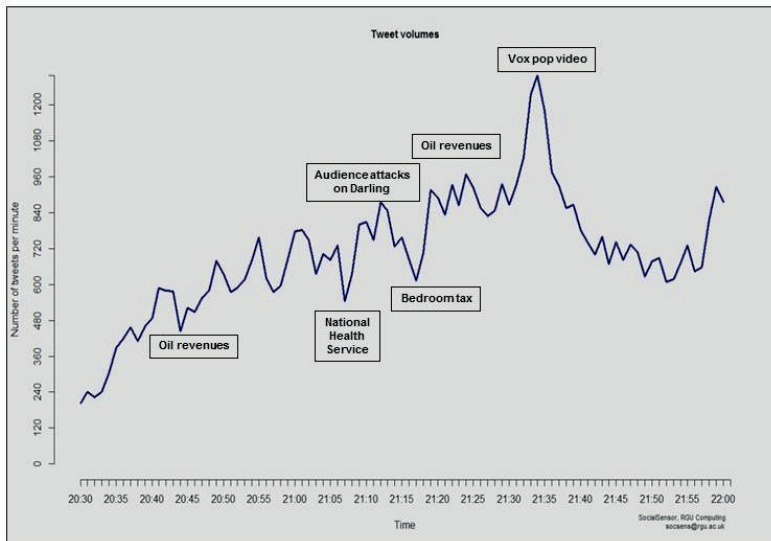

Figure 2: Peaks and Troughs in Twitter Discussion, Debate 2, 25 August 2014

Figure 2, meanwhile, plots the sample's tweets during Debate 2. As can be seen, there was a very large peak at 21:33 BST. This occurred at the start of a "vox pop" video showing Scottish people talking about the importance of voting in the referendum. The previous 30 minutes had been very heated, with the two politicians and the moderator talking over each other and much shouting. Perhaps, then, viewers were too busy trying to follow the arguments and listen to the intense debate to tweet. Once a break was caused by the video they then started to tweet about what they had just seen. This corresponds to research by Wohn and Na (2011) into Twitter use during television programmes which suggests that use increases during commercial breaks when viewers are able to turn their attention from what was happening on screen to discuss events on Twitter, and that this particularly happens when the advertising break comes after a "cliff-hanger" in the

narrative of the programme. Other than this, the sample showed a general rise in tweets apart from two troughs at 21:07 and 21:17 and a further peak at the end of the debate. It should also be noted that another peak was stimulated by a question from a member of the audience asking Darling "If we are better together, why aren't we better together already?" This came a few minutes after another audience member had accused Darling of being a hypocrite for attending dinners with representatives from private healthcare companies, and the combined peaks between 21:09 and 21:13 seem to be in response to both of these audience comments.

Figure 3 plots the sample's tweets for the third debate, and again we generally see a gentle rise in the number of tweets throughout the broadcast. With Debate 3, the number of tweets from our sample, even during the highest peaks, was much less than in the previous two debates. It is perhaps unsurprising that this debate attracted fewer tweets, because it was not as high profile as those between the two campaign leaders, and was not advertised as much as the other two outside STV itself. Also, perhaps, more voters would have made up their minds by this point in the campaign, resulting in a reduction in the numbers still seeking information. It may also be that viewers were now suffering from debate-exhaustion. Some might also have been put off by the bellicosity of the first two debates, particularly the second, and it should be noted that media discussion of the third debate focused on its comparatively civilised and quiet approach (e.g., Macmahon, 2014). This debate was also different in that it included a non-politician (the actor Elaine C. Smith) and her section of the debate, a discussion of social justice issues with Kezia Dugdale MSP between 20:42 and 21:00, saw a steeper rise in the rate of tweets, plus two of the highest peaks in the Twitter traffic. Looking more closely at the sample's comments on the individual debaters, it became clear that Smith dominated the discussion. This may be because, as a non-politician, she was a comparatively fresh face for the audience on the subject of independence. It may also be that her contribution to the debate focused more on appeals to the heart rather than to the head. Indeed, in his review of this debate, Macmahon (2014) described Smith as probably losing on policy detail but winning on charisma and audience appeal.
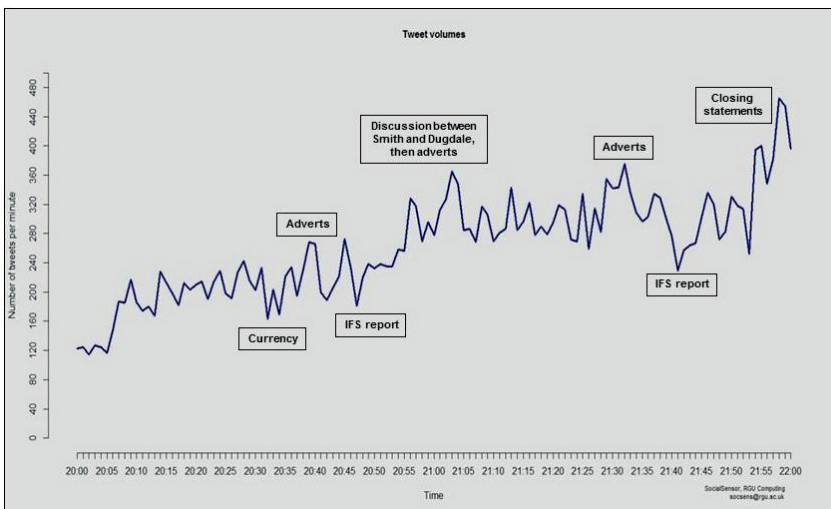

Figure 3: Peaks and Troughs in Twitter Discussion, Debate 3, 2 September 2014

6. Conclusions

Overall, and in line with the findings of Kalsnes *et al.* (2014), Twitter posts made during the three live televised debates followed the agenda set by the mainstream media and the politicians very closely. Thus, when the debaters on television discussed the currency issue, Twitter users did so also. With regard to the peaks and troughs in Twitter traffic during the three debates, there were some similarities and some differences. For example, the end of all three debates saw an increase in Twitter conversation as viewers turned away from their screens to discuss what they had just witnessed. Other peaks came during advertising breaks, spin room chats or vox pop videos, which offered an opportunity for the sample to stop watching the television and start to tweet, particularly after moments of high drama or complex argument. This suggests that spin rooms and vox pops are not essential elements in a televised political debate, and it was noticeable that the second STV debate did not include the spin room discussions.

While there was a general trend in all three debates for Twitter traffic to increase throughout each event, the topics that were the foci of the peaks in this discussion did change somewhat as the debates continued. While certain subjects, such as currency and oil revenues, attracted Twitter discussion in all three debates, our findings indicate that there was no one subject that consistently caused the highest peaks. Instead, our sample of tweeters responded most vigorously to new topics, or new debaters, in each programme. In Debate 1, the two key issues that stimulated peaks in Twitter posts were currency and 'Project Fear' accusations. In Debate 2, discussion of oil revenues and attacks on Darling by audience members prompted the largest peaks. While in Debate 3, the involvement of a non-politician, Elaine C. Smith, dominated Twitter posts. This suggests that viewers were keen to discuss the question of independence from all sides of the question and that fresh issues that had not been previously discussed in detail were more likely to provoke discussion on Twitter rather than those already covered in earlier debates. Perhaps not surprisingly, the sample also responded most strongly to what might be called 'moments of political theatre' rather than thoughtful debate – as a strong surge in Twitter comments after the raised voices and aggressive questions to Alistair Darling in Debate 2, and an impassioned speech by Elaine C. Smith in Debate 3, demonstrated. However, there were some issues that failed to stimulate Twitter discussion throughout all three debates, most notably the Institute of Fiscal Studies report.

7. Further Research

This paper has introduced an ongoing research project based on data collected during the last month of the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign and has taken an initial quantitative approach. However, much more assessment and qualitative analysis will be undertaken. In particular, it is believed that the following subjects are worthy of further study:

Twitter discourse external to politics. Analysis of the discussion during the debates suggests that a high proportion of tweets discussed issues other than political ones, but were stimulated by the programme they were watching. For example, discussion of the opinions of others watching in the same room; of the organisation of the event; or of the television company's approach to the debate and possible bias.

Humour and cultural references. The use of all types of humour, from sarcasm to farce, was frequently found in the tweets. Often this humour was made with reference to television programmes, films or music, and tweeters demonstrated a rich cultural hinterland that they obviously expected others on Twitter to share. In Debate 2, for example, a very high number of tweets discussed the choice of Salmond to walk away from the podium to address the audience directly. These tweets came from both sides of the independence argument and were both positive and negative. There were frequent suggestions that Salmond had learned such behaviour from the American television programme *West Wing* in which both President Jed Bartlett and Presidential candidate Matt Santos frequently roamed around the stage and walked in front of the podium. Previous researchers have also identified humour as a typical element of Twitter exchanges during televised debates (e.g. Harrington *et al.*, 2013; Kalsnes *et al.*, 2014) and further analysis in this area will help to deepen our understanding of the use of humour in online political communication.

Comments on the debaters' appearance and physical attributes. Criticisms and attacks on the debaters were often framed in terms of their physical appearance, clothing or supposed sexuality. A preliminary analysis of insults used in the sample suggests both a creative and wide-ranging frame of reference for such insults and also something of a gender divide. A small minority of tweeters in Debate 3 used sexual and sexually violent insults to attack the female debaters, while this did not happen in reference to any of the male debaters throughout the three events. More research needs to be undertaken, but these preliminary findings do agree with other research into attacks on women politicians on Twitter (e.g. Bartlett *et al.*, 2013).

Understanding the information sources used by tweeters. Tweeters frequently referred their readers to information sources outside Twitter. More research is needed to assess the quality and usefulness of such further information sources, but it seems clear that content can emerge independently of the broadcast, as Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011) suggest in their analysis of Twitter during a 2009 BBC *Question Time* programme featuring Nick Griffin of the far-right British National Party as a panellist. They found that information and images of Griffin were circulated on Twitter during the programme, but were produced by tweeters themselves as extra information for their audience rather than being produced by the television programme, demonstrating more knowledge and effort by the originator than merely repeating information from the programme's producers. There was evidence of similar activity in some of the tweets surrounding the television debates, from both the two campaign teams and other Twitter accounts, and more research is planned in this area.

Meta-talk about the debate on Twitter itself. There was frequent discussion amongst tweeters of the discussion occurring on Twitter itself, both positive and negative in tone. During Debate 1, some prospective viewers were unable to access the debate via the STV player and therefore turned to Twitter to try to follow proceedings. In Debate 2 there was some discussion about whether the usual hashtag #indyref should be used or that suggested by the BBC, #bbcindyref. Others commented on popular retweets, or challenged or applauded tweets from the two campaign headquarters. Such activity demonstrates a consciousness amongst Twitter users of the media they are using and its potential use by politicians and the media. Given previous research on the influence of Twitter on those following televised debates and tweeting at the same time – e.g. Houston *et al.* (2013)'s finding that live-tweeting a debate allows for more thoughtful processing of the debate content and may impact on candidate evaluations – this is another aspect of our findings that will repay further study. In addition, we plan to investigate the *types* of tweet used during the televised debates. Twitter offers different ways of tweeting, which might be

compared to Chadwick's (2006) typology of the various modes of online communication, i.e. one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many. Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011) suggest that Twitter offers at least three of these modes: directed tweets from one account to another account using the @ symbol; retweets, facilitating the one-to-many mode; and hashtags, offering the many-to-many mode. In their analysis of *Question Time* tweets they found a decrease in directed tweets and an increase in retweeting and the use of hashtags over the course of the programme, suggesting a growing engagement in the many-to-many collective environment. It will be interesting to see whether this was replicated during the Scottish independence referendum debates

The use of Twitter by the two campaigns. Both the Yes Scotland and Better Together campaigns made use of Twitter to disseminate their messages to both their own supporters and others. By making use of neutral hashtags such as #indyref during the televised debates, the campaigns were able to gain much wider dissemination of their messages outside the hard core of political users. Before the first debate, Yes Scotland issued a directive to its supporters to retweet its tweets during the debate. Throughout the debate, Yes Scotland then continuously tweeted messages about its campaign and policy promises, thus accessing voters outside their own committed supporters. In contrast, Better Together focused more on tweets commenting on the debate itself rather than disseminating their own message. It should be noted that, by the time of the second debate, Yes Scotland had double the number of followers on Twitter than the No campaign and was following over 25 times more accounts than the No campaign, suggesting significantly more involvement from the Yes campaign in Twitter. This may be related to the age profile of social-media users: while older people are using social media in greater numbers than ever before, it is still dominated by the younger generations, and research suggests that these younger demographics were also more supportive of independence (Curtice, 2013). Given that the eventual result of the referendum was a win for the No campaign, this does raise questions about the importance and impact of social media as a campaigning tool, which needs further investigation. Thus the two campaigns' different use of Twitter as a tool for communicating with voters during the debates will repay further analysis.

Twitter as an alternative media. Much has been made of the role of social media as an alternative to mainstream media. Bruns and Burgess certainly found agendas independent to those of the mainstream media on the hashtag #ausvote during the Australian federal elections of 2010, although they tracked Twitter over a period of a month rather than just focusing on televised debates. Perhaps unsurprisingly, during the three debates discussed in this paper, where the broadcasters, campaign groups and individual political parties overtly encouraged viewers to tweet (and retweet) along with the live broadcast, there was little evidence of such alternativeness. Instead, and in line with Kalsnes *et al.* (2014), Twitter discussion followed the agenda of the debates very closely, suggesting that Twitter does not offer a space for alternative politics, at least during such televised events. However, in the 'Big Big Debate' – an event held in Glasgow before an audience of 7,000 school pupils aged 16-17 - there was some evidence that Twitter could act as an alternative to the mainstream media. That debate was organised by the BBC during the school day and selected highlights were then broadcast in the evening. The Yes side was represented by Nicola Sturgeon and Patrick Harvie, and the No side by Ruth Davidson and Respect Party MP George Galloway. Because it was edited before broadcast it offered the opportunity for the pupils who were at the debate to tweet their opinions of the edited version and also to tweet about the event as it happened. In fact, the organisers of the debate encouraged pupils to use the hashtag

#bigbigdebate and also ran the Twitter feed live on the stage. Awareness of the event was therefore raised through the pupils' tweets during the day and their criticisms of the organisation of the event and of the BBC's editing circulated via both Twitter and Facebook. The pupils complained about having to wait for four hours for the event to start in an over-heating hall with no air conditioning and very bright lights. More damagingly for the BBC they also tweeted accusations that Yes voters had been asked to pretend to be No voters in order to present a balanced audience to viewers, and, when the edited highlights were broadcast, alleged that the BBC had edited the debate to remove the negative response of the audience (booing) to some of the debaters (see Ross, 2014). Thus that televised debate offered some evidence of Twitter providing a venue for alternative discussion during televised debates – although the alternative discussion focused on the mainstream media rather than alternative politics.

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