The Agenda Setting Effects of CNN's Twitter in the 2016 Super Tuesday Primaries

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Abstract

Governmental fall downs, electoral outcomes, terrorism propaganda, and climate change awareness are just some of the commonly known results of the effects of news media coverage on the public opinion and society as a whole. For years, researchers have utilized the agenda setting theory as a basis for their studies on the effects of the news media coverage on the public opinion in countless of contexts. The purpose of this study was to analyze the agenda setting effects of a major broadcast news organization but from one of their most influential social media channels, Twitter. CNN's daily Twitter mentions of the 2016 presidential candidates during three Super Tuesday primaries were analyzed in order to identify functions of agenda setting. In addition, the data was compared to the electoral results, specifically the number of delegates each candidate won during the Super Tuesday primaries. Although the results show a clear first level agenda setting function of CNN's Twitter, they did not show concrete evidence that CNN's twitter mentions of candidates are directly related to the number of delegates they earned.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Consider that news media organizations can influence voters during presidential elections. Suppose that this influence is due to the amount of media coverage or mentions given to a certain candidate over others on Twitter. This study is an analysis of CNN's Twitter mentions of the 2016 presidential candidates and its effects on voters during three Super Tuesday primaries.

"McCombs and Shaw (1972) argued that the mass media has an agenda-setting function" (Hill, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 7). This function refers to the significant correlation between the prominence of attribute issues in the media and the agenda of attributes among audiences. This study examines how the news media utilizes Twitter to emphasize certain political candidates by attributing them more mentions. From an agenda setting perspective, this emphasis on a particular candidate in the media influences the salience of the candidate among audiences.

According to the second-level of agenda setting theory, the media shapes the public's conversations by attributing importance to some stories or issues over others. In this particular case, in the midst of presidential elections, the theory hypothesizes that the media will shape the public's conversations by attributing more twitter mentions to a specific candidate, in turn, exposing the audience to a candidate more than the others. This study explores if the more the media "tweets" about a certain candidate, the more likely it influenced voters and therefore win the majority of the delegates accounted for on three major Super Tuesday primary elections.

For decades, news organizations have been making decisions about which stories should air and how much coverage should be given to each. When the media chooses to air or print a certain story the public gathers the information, creates an opinion, and generates a reaction on the events that the press decided to cover. The stories that generate more interest among the public become the media agenda and by default become the public agenda. Researchers question who dictates the agenda after all, since the public remains ignorant of issues the media decided were not newsworthy of coverage in the first place. This ambiguity about how much freedom the public actually has to choose what is relevant or not generates controversy among the public's opinion. Bernard Cohen in his 1963 book, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, stated that although the press might not succeed at telling people how to think, it succeeds on telling people what to think about. In other words, one could argue that the media does shape what people think is relevant by simply covering certain issues and ignoring others. This is why some argue that there might a hidden agenda behind the media's news coverage influenced by major power relations, which the agenda setting theory describes as power relations between media and other sources. Littlejohn and Foss (2011) suggest there are four types of power relations between media and other sources: High-power source & high-power media, high-power source & low-power media, low-power source & high-power media, low-power source & low-power media.

McCombs (2004) discusses how the seeds for the empirical research and conversations on agenda setting began because of the coverage of three major news stories published in the *Los Angeles Times*. One story, internationally, was about the unexpected shift Labour to Conservative in the British county council elections; nationally, a budding scandal in Washington; and locally, the firing of the Los Angeles metropolitan area director of a large federally funded program that was a keystone in the national "War on Poverty." The *Los Angeles*

Times put the local story in the lead position on page one relegating the other two to single-column headlines. McCombs (2004) argues that any of these stories in the absence of the other two could have been the page one lead, which led to a discussion at a faculty meeting among a group of several young faculty members from UCLA. They wondered if the impact of an event diminishes when a news story receives less prominent play. In addition, one could argue that agenda setting occurs due to a psychological human necessity to explore a new setting. For example, the Monica Lewinsky-Bill Clinton scandal was given massive news coverage. However, it never achieved salience among the public because the scandal was never considered an important public issue. This means that the degree of influence and effect of the media coverage will always be correlated to the need for information that exists among the public, which not always correlates to the amount of coverage given to an issue. This is why the evolution and research of agenda setting on the contingent conditions that modify agenda setting effects that initiated in the early 1970's continues to this day in new settings such as the Internet.

The process of the agenda setting theory has three key components: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1998). These phases are "continuing lines of inquiry that parallel each other in time" (McCombs, 2004, p. 67). The first phase of the process is the importance of the issues that are going to be discussed in the media. Second, the issues discussed in the media have an impact over what people think is important. Lastly, the public agenda influences the policy agenda (Spring, 2002).

Agenda setting has been researched and expanded for many years by communication and social science scholars. "Agenda-setting theory has become a highly detailed map of the mass media agenda and its effects" (McCombs, 2004, p.4). It has been used to research and analyze the media's influence on the public's opinion through countless case studies on many different

areas of research. As of 2006, more than 400 empirical studies have been made all over the world about the effects of agenda setting including Spain, Argentina, The United States, Tokyo, Japan and Pamplona. There are a considerable variety of issues that have been examined over the past thirty-five years encompassing agenda setting and its effects on public policy, foreign policy, terrorism, the environment, and of course presidential elections. In *The Making of the President*, 1972, American journalist Theodore White described the power of mass communication to set the agenda of public opinion as "an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties and mandarins" (McCombs, 2004, p.4).

However, the future of agenda-setting theory with the advent of the Internet and social media has given rise to a variety of opinions. Some argue the power of traditional media has weakened and its role has continued on the Internet, as it was predicated on traditional media's monopoly over news. "Since 1999, the media landscape has been altered considerably, allowing individuals to post, share, and republish content to the web through easy-to-use web publishing tools. This more responsive Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2004) has facilitated an enhanced degree of connectivity, collaboration, and conversation among decentralized web publics" (Meraz, 2011, p. 108).

Research Questions

R1. Do news organizations use their twitter accounts in presidential elections in ways that indicate functions of agenda setting?

The impact of social media on the political landscape is a pressing topic in the study of political campaigns. "Scholars are struggling to understand the effects of social media on the various types of agenda setting" (Conway, 2015, p. 363). A growing line of research has also examined the complex relationships with those issues "trending" in the Twitter-sphere and issues

given more coverage in traditional media (Groshek & Groshek, 2010; Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009; Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, & Shah, 2010). Conway (2015) discusses how "social media are now essentials of the political campaign" (p. 365). In fact, the Obama administration (Office of the Press Secretary, 2011) and the Twitter debate held by the 2012 GOP candidates demonstrates how Twitter is being adopted as a new political podium that facilitates politician-constituent dialogue and, therefore, create news.

H1. CNN's twitter account will influence the 2016 Super Tuesdays' primaries results by attributing more mentions to a particular GOP and Democratic presidential candidate from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016.

This hypothesis is based on the second-level of agenda setting that examines the transference of salience of issues from the news media agenda to the public agenda. "It is conceivable that one persuasive person could, through the use of mass media, bend the world's population to his will" (Cartwright, 1949, p. 253). Bryant, Zillmann, & Oliver (2002) argue that billions of dollars are spent each year in attempt to change people's attitudes about political candidates, consumer products and charitable causes. "In most of these instances, the ultimate goal is to influence people's behavior so that they will vote for certain politicians or referenda; purchase specific goods; engage in safer driving, eating, and sexual activities; and donate money to various religious, environmental, and educational organizations and institutions" (Bryant, Zillmann, & Oliver, 2002). The veracity of this hypothesis will depend on the success of CNN's prominence of Twitter mentions about a particular presidential candidate and whether or not it effectively changes the attitudes and behaviors of the voters on the Super Tuesday primary.

In primary elections, voters resort to the mass media for orientation and pertinent information about the situation just like freshmen resort to their college orientation to become

familiar with their environment (McCombs, 2004). "Conceptually, an individual's need for orientation is defined in terms of lower-order concepts, relevance and uncertainty, whose roles occur sequentially" (McCombs, 2004, p. 54). In addition, "agenda-setting effects are more than the result of how accessible or available an issue is in the minds of the public" (McCombs, 2004, p. 59). Although the empirical measure more commonly used to predict the effect of news coverage among the public tends to be related to the amount of coverage given to such, it is not always a matter of its cognitive availability. This question is pertinent as scholars consider Twitter to play a similar role to that of traditional news media functioning more like a news outlet than a social one. This question particularly addresses how traditional media outlets utilize social media, specifically Twitter, to transfer salience from the Twitter agenda to the public agenda. Super Tuesday's primary results will show if the candidates with the most Twitter mentions for each party won the most delegates.

Research Method

This study collected daily number of Twitter mentions from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016 from CNN's Twitter account. The daily number of mentions per presidential candidate was used to determined functions of first level agenda setting as it pertains to the issues (candidates) the media covers the most. The mentions are compared to the Super Tuesday's Primary results for both the GOP and the Democratic Party elections. Pre-election polls were not considered as a dependent variable since they involve geographical, demographical, and psychological factors since the content of the tweets was not analyzed. In addition, pre-election polls present major challenges as voters can change their intentions, can decide to not actually vote, and may not be completely honest. According to the Pew Research Center, "although election polls attract a great deal of attention for their ability to predict the outcome of elections,

their most important function is to help journalists and citizens understand the meaning of the campaign and the election" (2016). Polls help explain what issues are important and help keep a good track record of how candidate qualities may affect voter's decisions, however, they cannot capture the impact of the campaign and events to come.

Need for Research

For decades, media scholars have researched the effects of agenda setting during presidential elections as it pertains to traditional news organizations. However, there is a growing field of research exploring the effects of social media into the electoral context. "Agenda-setting theory, which suggests that the media have the power to determine the important issues of the day, is currently undergoing scrutiny" (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015, p. 364). Hill, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2002) argue agenda setting relies on a memory-based model of information processing in which certain pieces of information are more accessible to viewers (audiences) than others, meaning that the decision making will be based on a large degree on how easily accessible certain issues are in the public's minds than others. "Accessibility is essentially a function of "how much" or "how recently" a person has been exposed to certain issues" (Hill, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002). This study contributes to the theoretical and applied research of agenda-setting as it measures accessibility by the percentage of Twitter mentions, in addition to exploring agenda-setting of a news organization in primary elections through non-traditional media as it pertains to the social media sphere. This study is unique as it analyzes the agenda setting functions of a news organization Twitter feed to the results of the 2016 Super Tuesday primary elections. If results indicate that there is no correlation between the percentages of Twitter mentions of presidential candidates and the Super Tuesday primary results, it will show that Twitter as a media tool does not transfer salience of issues to the public. However, if the

results indicate that candidates with the most mentions are able to win the majority of delegates in the Super Tuesday primaries, it will show that Twitter feeds of news organizations indicate functions of agenda setting as they transfer salience of issues to voters.

Context: Super Tuesday

Super Tuesday refers informally to one or more Tuesdays early in the United States primary elections when the greatest number of states holds primary elections. "One of the goals of the southern Democrats who created Super Tuesday in 1988 was to increase the amount of national attention focused on the South" (Gurian, 1991, p. 761). It is significantly important to presidential candidates to do well on this day in order to secure their party's nomination. The particular states holding primaries on Super Tuesday have varied from year to year since it is up to each state to decide whether to participate or not. On 2008, Super Tuesday primaries were held on February 5 where Democrats hold contests in 22 states and one territory, 52 percent of delegates were awarded, and the Republicans scheduled contests in 21 states with 975 delegates at stake (Balz, 2008).

This year, Super Tuesday was held on March 1, 2016, the biggest single day for presidential candidates to receive delegates due to 11 voting states and one U.S. territory. The states holding primaries for both parties were: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia. In addition, Alaska held Republican caucuses, American Samoa caucused for Democrats, and Colorado caucused for both parties although only the Democrats were choosing a candidate. 595 Republican delegates- about 25 percent of the total number- were at stake. Republicans need 1, 237 delegates to win the party's nomination. Republicans in Colorado opted to select delegates only and let those delegates chose which candidate to support at the national convention. Democrats need 2,383

delegates to win the nomination from which 1,004 were available on March 1, roughly one third of those needed to win. The states involved in the 2016 Super Tuesday primaries also represent 130 "Super Delegates," who are Democrats not pledged to support the winner from their states. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Super Delegates have already expressed their support for Hillary Clinton.

This year, Super Tuesday was also known as the "SEC Primary." Earlier this year, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas opted to join Georgia and Tennessee in holding primaries on Super Tuesday. All of this coalition of Southern States had sport teams competing in the Southeastern Conference, a U.S. college athletics league, which led to the name of the "SEC Primary."

In addition, party leaders benefit from the results of the Super Tuesday primary elections as they influence donors' decisions. "During the 2008 primaries, the last open-seat race, candidates for the Democratic nomination raised a staggering $787 million, while Republicans raised $477 million" (Schwabe, 2014). Since donors give gradually to candidates and the money follows electoral success, candidates must either win the majority of the states or delegates in order to convince donors that it is worth the investment. Schwabe (2014) argues this is mainly due to donors being able to balance the costs and informational benefits of funding campaigns during primaries.

Gurian (1991) argues that studies of media coverage of presidential nomination campaigns show consistently that the news media focuses heavily on states with a greater number of delegates during primaries. In addition, history shows that the winning candidates regardless of their party have a significant increase in their media coverage. "News coverage is a critical component of modern presidential nomination campaigns" (Gurian, 1993). In 2012,

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney won six out of ten states in Super Tuesday and built a momentum in the national media narrative (Eggerton, 2012).

For the candidates, Super Tuesday could be a day that makes or breaks their campaigns due to the number of delegates at stake. Though after Super Tuesday large primaries were held, including Florida, Illinois, North Carolina and Missouri on March 15 and New York on April 19, the SEC primaries are still a good indicator of who may win the nomination for their respective party (Gore, 2016). Montanaro (2016) references Super Tuesday as having a "snowball effect" on the candidate's campaigns. "If Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina were the kids' snowball that started down the mountain, Super Tuesday is what happens when that snowball hits the steepest part of the slope" (Montanaro, 2016).

The study explores the correlation between the percentages of twitter mentions of a major U.S. news network, CNN. Starting the week before the first Super Tuesday primary until the third Super Tuesday, data was gathered daily to determine CNN's twitter effects on voters as seen in the results of each Super Tuesday primary. "The root of the argument is quantitative, suggesting that the greater frequency of exposure to the issues (presidential candidates) makes them more likely to be used (voted) by the audience" (Hill, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 9). The study collects twitter analytics data from CNN's account from February 23, 2016 to March 22, 2016, estimating the percentages of the 2016 presidential candidates who were mentioned the most. Then, it compares the data with the first, second, and third Super Tuesday primary results for both the Democratic Party and the GOP.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Agenda-setting as defined in *Mass Media, Mass Culture,* is the process whereby the mass media determine the public's thoughts and concerns. The following literature explores the theory of agenda-setting and the effects of media agenda in the public opinion. The purpose is to highlight the theoretical foundations including a brief history of the theory, core assumptions and levels of agenda setting, and the audience contingent effects of agenda setting and rhetoric. In addition, case studies of media agenda setting in presidential elections and its relationship with social media were considered. The empirical surveys and qualitative cases investigated and stated in this literature review show that the amount of media coverage given to a specific issue reflects on whether or not the public creates a cognitive perspective of the relevance of such. Bernard Cohen's (1963) statement predicted "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13). Whether social or political, local or national, public issues are generated by the media. The consequences of the transference of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda can go as far as creating temporary controversies to generating major public policy changes and in some cases governmental downfalls.

Theoretical Foundations

It is intriguing that the earliest social science investigations on agenda-setting found little to almost no evidence on the direct relationship between news coverage and the public's attitudes and opinions. However, in 1922, Walter Lippmann, newspaper commentator and author who made himself one of the most widely respected political columnists in the world, first posed the idea that the news media shapes public perception with images. Lippmann implied that ordinary

citizens can no longer judge public issues rationally since the mass media produces interpretations for them. In the first chapter of Public Opinion, Lippmann (1922) established the principal connection between world events and the images in the public mind. Lippmann's notion of the public's limited first hand knowledge of the real world, created the foundation for the agenda-setting theory.

Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia University conducted an empirical investigation in Eric Country Ohio the 1940's and 1950's that discovered that voters acquire information through the mass media. Despite some of them not changing their opinion, the considerable evidence showed that they learned from the news. This was not something alarming to journalists who have the tendency to usually be more concerned about informing than persuading, as usually persuasion is left for the editorial pages. In fact, "phrases such as 'what people need to know' and 'the people's right to know' are rhetorical standards in journalism" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.4). However, this evidence raised suspicions among sociologists that there were major media effects that have not yet been explored or measured.

Moreover, sociologists Trenman and McQuail found that high exposure to Liberal party television in the British General Election of 1959 was positively related to a more favorable attitude toward the Liberal party for those with medium to low motivation to follow the campaign. Their finding exemplifies the first assumptions about agenda-setting and how the amount of coverage given to a certain issue creates salience of the issue among audiences. Based on their finding Lang and Lang observed that "the mass media force attention to certain issues and builds up public images of political figures (candidates). The media is constantly presenting issues suggesting what audiences "should think about it, know about, and have feelings about" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177).

It was not until 1972 that Agenda-setting, also known as "The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media," was first put forth by communication and journalism scholars, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. In their first article, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," McCombs and Shaw (1972) initially investigated the 1968 US presidential elections and suggested that the media sets the public agenda by telling audiences what issues to think about, not necessarily how to think about them. They attempted to assess the relationship between what voters considered the most important issues and the content of the media during the campaign. Their conclusions showed that the mass media exercises a significant role on what voters considered the major issues of a campaign due to the amount of coverage devoted to such issues. In addition, voters who had their minds made up about a candidate since the beginning of the campaign voted for the candidate of their choice regardless of the amount of media coverage. McCombs and Shaw (1972) state in their abstract:

> In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the "agenda" of the campaign (p.176).

During the 1968 US presidential elections, McCombs and Shaw (1972), young professors at the University of North Carolina's School of Journalism began an investigation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina with the hypothesis "that the mass media set the agenda of issues for a political campaign by influencing the salience among voters" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 4). The testing of Chapel Hill voters brought two sets of evidence: the issues that were of the greatest concern to Chapel Hill voters and the issues that were more predominant in the agenda of the news used by the voters. In order to be able to determine the public agenda in Chapel Hill they

randomly selected undecided voters. In the survey, the undecided voters were asked to name the key issues of the day they saw that mattered the most regardless of their political parties. They also collected the nine major news sources used by these voters to be content analyzed: five local and national newspapers, two television networks and two news magazines. "The rank order of issues on the media agenda was determined by the number of news stories devoted to each issue in recent weeks" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 6). The results showed that there was a nearly perfect correlation between the ranking of the issues of Chapel Hill voters and the ranking in the media of the twenty-five weeks. The correlation means that the salience of undecided voters of five key campaign issues were virtually identical to the salience of news coverage of recent weeks. This proves that the pattern of news coverage of the media agenda becomes the most prominent public issue, in turn, the most important public issue. McCombs and Shaw (1972) illustrate the central assertion of agenda setting examined in Chapel Hill.

This does not imply that agenda setting "programs" the public's minds. However, "agenda setting does assign a central role to the news media initiating items for the public agenda… the information provided by the news media plays a key role on the construction of our pictures of reality. And, moreover, it is the total set of information provided by the news media that influences these pictures" (1972, p. 6). In other words, the media shapes people's realities and cognitive perceptions of issues. As McCombs and Shaw (1977) continued their research on agenda setting in presidential campaigns they pointed out that there is abundantly collected evidence that editors and broadcasters play an important part as they go through their daily tasks in deciding and publicizing news.

> "This impact of the mass media-the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking-has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about" (McCombs and Shaw, 1977, p.5).

Core Assumptions and Levels of Agenda-Setting

At its core agenda-setting is the creation of awareness and perceived importance of salient issues by the news media. Two assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: 1. The press and the media do not reflect reality, they filter and shape it. 2. The media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. In other words, the press selectively chooses what we see or hear in the media shaping our perception of what and why a certain issue is important.

In addition to the core assumptions, there are two levels of agenda setting. The first level deals with the transfer of salience from the mass media to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). "It mainly focuses on the common issues, events or political figures that are most predominant in the media agenda, and how the media agenda impacts audience perceptions about what issues are worthy of attention" (McCombs, 1992., Cheng, 2014, p.6). It basically focuses on what the news is and what people think about them. A more accurate definition is the following: "The process of the mass media presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others... the more coverage an issue receives, the more important it is to people" (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2009, p.147., Cheng, 2014, p.6).

The second level of agenda setting expands the original definition of agenda setting and focuses on the transfer of attribute salience (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). "The attribute agenda

determines how people think about an issue, a public figure or an object" (Kim & McCombs, 2007., Cheng, 2014, p. 9). There are two dimensions of study in the second level of agenda setting that describe the object and tone of its coverage. The first dimension is the substantive dimension which are the "attributes of issues or individuals that the media select to cover and that help people to cognitively structure and discern the selected objects" (Cheng, 2014, p.9). The second dimension refers to the affective attributes which is the positive, negative or neutral tone of how the media reports the selected attributes. According to Kiousis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban (1999) by definition the affective attributes refer to "those facets of news coverage that elicit emotional reactions from audience members" (Cheng, 2014, p.9).

These two levels of agenda-setting lead the path into the function of the concept. The first part of the process is the importance of the issues that the media discusses. Secondly, the issues discussed in the media have an impact over the way the public thinks which is referred to as the public agenda. Thirdly, the public agenda influences the policy agenda. Littlejohn (2002) states "the media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda (p. 320).

The Audience Contingent Effects of Agenda Setting and Rhetoric

In the setting of public policy and political communication, "a key function of political communication is to make the public think about an issue in a way that is favorable to the sender of the message. This means that every organization that desires to influence the public politically must attempt to control what ideas become dominant in the public sphere" (Lilleker, 2006, p. 27).

Lilleker (2006) argues that creating a cognitive connection among the public interests and what news is published and how, will have an influence in the public opinion. In a pluralist

democracy there are numerous of competing voices aiming to dominate the agenda. Environmentalist groups, for example, will try to get their stories into the news and try to control the way they are received by the media audiences in order to influence political organizations and corporations to achieve their goals. "Agenda setting plays a key role in any political organization's news management strategy, it provides work for spin-doctors and is a key feature of the public relations state" (Lillekers 28).

Furthermore, a question rises in the midst of presidential elections as it pertains to agenda-setting: Who sets the agenda? Research shows that certain groups are more prompt to set the media agenda. According to Lillekers (2006) there are insider and outsider groups in any society and the insiders have greater access to the news and mass media overall than the outsiders. The term insiders, usually refers to groups such as the military-industrial complex, corporate allies, and newspaper editors or media moguls. Furthermore, others argue that is the media alone that sets the agenda and that each organization has its own agenda.

In order to gain full understanding of the media's role in setting the agenda, Barbara J. Nelson explored Anthony Down's, political economist, theory of the "issue-attention cycle." Down's issue-attention cycle describes media, public and governmental interest in child maltreatment at the point when the problem was 'discovered' in 1874, and when the Mary Ellen case became known. Nelson states that it is only fair to say that without the major coverage of the Mary Ellen case, child protection might never have become institutionalized as a social problem (Graber, 1984). "In the spring of 1874 the New York Times and the other New York papers reported that Mary Ellen Wilson had been chained to her bed and whipped daily with a rawhide cord by her stepmother" (Graber, 1987, p. 88). At this time, newspapers like the *Times* rarely published on abuse issues and in the case of doing so it was always in a soft tone, more

moderate than the tone used by the *New York Herald* and the *World.* The major coverage of the

Mary Ellen case was a significant contribution to the issue of child abuse as a social problem,

which was a concept in the early stages of development as there were legal traditions supporting

the father's right to raise a child as he saw fit making violence towards children fairly prevalent.

With the label "cruelty to children," newspapers continued to publish stories on brutal child

abuse which precipitated the creation of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to

Children (New York SPCC), the nation's first charitable organization dedicated to identifying ill-

treated children.

However, after the novelty of the Mary Ellen case wore off, newspapers and professional

journals reduced their coverage on child abuse stories making it only a sporadic issue. It was

only ninety years later that the issue on cruelty to children regained the center stage in the media

due to the article "The Battered-Child Syndrome" by pediatrician Dr. C. Henry Kempe and his

associates, published in the July 7, 1962 issue of the "Journal of the American Medical

Association." After this article, scholars from all professions published about 260 articles and

mass-circulation magazines published twenty-eight articles in the decade after Kempe's

publication compared to three the decade before.

The relationship between the mass media and research organizations in all fields has been

long institutionalized and has serve as a "fresh story" source for journalists while giving

recognition to scholars. In this case, it provided a major source of child abuse stories. Also, since

the issue was linked with larger concerns such as interfamilial violence, abuse of a spouse,

grandparent, parent or any other family member, it increased the interest between the media and

the public agenda. "First and foremost, coverage of abuse increased because stories about

specific types of child abuse were added to the earlier, more general reports. In other words,

coverage increased because the general problem of abuse was differentiated intro more narrowly defined topics such as the relationship between illegitimacy and abuse, or abuse within military families" (Graber, 1987, p. 90). One can see how the media created the demand for, and was a product of, governmental action.

However, when the research in this field declined because of the decrease of research funding, less media coverage was given to the matter as journalists did not have more new material to cover. The great fear of public policy advocates against child abuse, for example, is that as the media coverage declines so does the public's interest. This can happen with any other issue, even with coverage on presidential candidates for that matter.

Nevertheless, research suggests that when the amount of coverage given to an issue is measured in terms of agenda setting, the amount of coverage or lack of thereof always results in shaping the public's opinion. In fact, researchers (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2010) have found that newspapers have a major influence in transferring issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda as television news in many countries are partly controlled by the government. In order for broadcasting news to have more influence than newspapers over the public opinion, such organizations will need to have trust and reliability among its audiences. "If there is a correlation between the agenda-setting power and credibility of different media, then in some cases, television can be expected to be more powerful than newspapers and public service media more powerful than commercial media" (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2010, p. 272). This is why McCombs (2004) argues that television news organizations which are partly controlled by the governments "can diminish the credibility of television news" (p. 49). Even countries such as the United States, free and democratic, where broadcasting media operates partly independent as

public service and partly as a for-profit business; American's trust level in the media has drifted downward over the past decade (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Americans used to have trust and confidence in the mass media- such as newspapers, TV and radio but that has declined significantly in the past decade or so. A 2015 Gallup poll indicates, "four in 10 Americans say they have a great deal or a fair amount of trust and confidence in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly" (Riffkin, 2015). Prior to 2004, a slight majority, 55% of Americans said they trusted the mass media. The number of distrust seems even bigger among younger Americans. According to Riffkin (2015) trust has typically dipped in election years, including 2004, 2008, 2012. "This decline follows the same trajectory as American's confidence in many institutions and their declining trust in the federal government's ability to handle domestic and international problems over the same time period" (Riffkin, 2015).

The "issue-attention cycle," in the context of presidential campaigns, shapes the media agenda as news organizations are looking for "fresh, new" stories on the presidential candidates. In the same way, presidential candidates are competing with each other for media attention as they understand the more media coverage they have, the more the public will talk about them. However, the effects of the media coverage given to an issue or presidential candidate will depend on the specific media type, whether broadcast or print. "Agenda-setting influence for television news appears to have more immediate effects on public opinion, while the duration of effects via print media are longer" (Wanta, 1997; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2015, p. 273).

The effects of broadcasting agenda setting were studied in Russia were it was seen that regardless of the 'issue' on the news agenda, "the media can attract and direct attention to problems, solutions or people in ways which can favor those with power and correlatively diver

attention from rival individuals or groups" (McQuail, p. 21). In addition, favoring those in favor might seem advisable when emerging media enterprises are in the need for subsidies and advertising.

Russia has been experiencing an extremely difficult process moving on from a highly controlled media system by the central government to a more open system. "The need for subsidies made Russian media vulnerable to pressure by private and public financial sponsors to control the political content of the news" (Graber, 1984, p. 363). After the Chechnya war, 1994-1995, commercial television enterprises had grown strong, independent and stable enough to win over the public's confidence being able to contest the government's version of the struggle. This was possible due to efforts of independent television stations who showed pictures of Russian boys dying in ghastly ways, of desperately wounded civilians and deep divisions among the people ruling Russia: Yeltsin's ruling circle, the military and the parliament. Despite the government showing always their own official version of the events, the Russian people always had access to the independently gathered information, which was forced to coexist with the government's. The results in surveys showed that the people found governmental sources of information less trustworthy. When asked: "governmental and nongovernmental sources of information covering the events in Chechnya often contradict each other. Which of them do you, personally, trust more?" (Graber, 1984, p. 373)." The answers were:

Governmental sources	14%
Nongovernmental sources	46%
Don't know/no answer	40%

In Soviet times, despite nongovernmental sources not having the freedom to coexist with those from the government, the public lacked trust of the officially televised and printed news as

they lacked correlation with their daily lives. This is why the Russian people now had a media source that correlated the result of what they saw during the Chechnya war; they acted accordingly in the polls. A week before the 1995 parliament elections, Russians were asked if they would take into account the position or party of the candidate on peaceful talk in Chechnya. More than three quarters of likely voters said they would choose advocates of a peaceful resolution. "It was television that provided, for most people, the information they could not get in their everyday lives" (Graber, 1984, p. 373). By showing angry and contentious disputes, television exposed the division among the people ruling Russia creating a series of messages for people to process on their own information, which enabled them to create their own 'judgments about the competence of their leaders.'

Agenda Setting in Presidential Elections

Media scholars have considered agenda setting as it pertains to three main areas: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda. Although the vast majority of research has focused on the relationship between the media and the public agenda, a study conducted by Boyle (2001) during the 1996 presidential elections aimed to go beyond this relationship. The study analyzed 116 political television advertisements, 818 newspaper stories from three major news papers, and 101 network news stories from television network newscasts to determine what-if-any-intermedia agenda-setting influences existed. In other words, it aimed to answer a major research question in agenda-setting: How is the media agenda set? Boyle (2001) argued that media scholars have examined how the agenda of television news coverage in presidential elections is set with one consistent finding: the predominance of "horse race" reporting. Horse race journalism is the term used "when journalists focus on candidates' polling positions rather than their policies." Such coverage can leave voters uninformed, but for candidates doing well in

the polls it means a lot of free publicity as news editors tend to devote more coverage to whoever

the polls say are leading the race. Therefore, it comes as no surprise than in the 2016 presidential

elections GOP candidate Donald Trump has significantly received more news coverage than any

other GOP candidate. Aljazeera reported:

> "Donald Trump is the best example of someone who is incredibly gifted at getting free media coverage... any time you see a politician pulling off, or trying to pull off, a stunt or make a bold proposal, a lot of the reason behind that is for the media. Every campaign has to chase that free media coverage and the way to do that in America is to feed into the narrative of winning and losing and being exciting."

In addition, Senator Hilary Clinton has been leading in all 2016 democratic presidential

nomination polling data which according to Boyle (2001) would be the reason of the major news

coverage she has received over Senator Bernie Sanders. During the presidential elections of

2012, Dana Bilmank from The Washington Post, wrote an open letter pleading with Mitt

Romney, the candidate who "loves to pose" as the media's victim:

> "I speak for many colleagues when I say that we in the news media are great fans of your candidacy: of the 200 people in the room for your "Victory Party" when polls closed Tuesday night, about 185 of them were journalists. And no wonder: You're the only thing saving us from a long spring of despair, the only person who can, by extending the presidential race, drive up our audience and bring us the revenues we so desperately need. You give us exactly what political journalists crave. Sure, some of us are ideologically biased, but we are far more biased in favor of conflict — and that's why we're all in the tank for you," Dana Bilmank, The Washington Post.

Professor of Communications at George Mason Univeristy and director of the Center for

Media and Public Affaird, Robert Litcher, has conducted scientific studies of the news and

entertainment media. He once said "the tone of the coverage depends less than on the overall

dynamic of the race. Journalists love a horse race and hate a front-runner." In fact, sportswriters

are usually suspected of favoring a particular team. However, they commonly say "I just root for

the story" in order to defend the charge (Fry, 2012). Jack Shafer has noted, "the professional

incentives facing campaign reporters and sportswriters are strikingly similar: both must maintain

reader enthusiasm for the months and months of caucuses or preseason games, primaries or

regular season games, conventions or playoffs, and the general election or Super Bowl (or World

Series)" (Fry, 2012). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that news organizations will "cheer" for

the underdog. On Super Tuesday 3, Senator Marco Rubio, 2016 GOP presidential candidate, lost

his state of Florida leaving him no other choice than to withdraw from the race. That left Donald

Trump, Senator Ted Cruz, and Governor John Kasich still running for the Republican

nomination. However, when CNN's projected results showed that Gov. Kasich would win his

state of Ohio it suddenly seemed possible for the "underdog" to have a chance at winning the

Republican nomination. CNN and other major news organizations had Gov. Kasich live via

telephone interviews right before and after he gave his victory speech in Ohio. It was the

headline of newspapers and TV news shows the next day. It was the media covering the 2016

presidential elections as a "horse race."

This issue of horse race, raises the concern about what an electoral campaign is supposed

to be about. Is it about issues and which issues exactly? Or perhaps, an electoral campaign is

supposed to be about the character and certain characteristics of the candidate. Holler and Skott

(2005) found that framing effects imply that election campaigns may be an important

determinant of election outcomes. The argument of their study was based in two premises: that

election campaigns can and often do influence voting behavior and electoral outcomes, and that

election campaigns typically focus on a small set of issues (p. 216). Their assumption is that

"voting decisions are made on the basis of an evaluation of the two parties with respect to the

issues that are included in the election agenda" (Holler & Skott, 2005, p. 216). The dynamics of

this characteristic of campaigning has been described as the issue-ownership theory of voting.

"The problems facing the country and the issues of concern to the voters shape the competitive environment of an election" (Petrocik, Benoit & Hansen, 2003). Thus, each party makes strategic decisions of what kind of issues they want to focus to determine the agenda. "Election campaigns aim to achieve a strategic advantage by making problems which reflect owned issues the programmatic meaning of the election and the criteria by which voters make their choice" (Petrocik, 1996, p.286., Holler & Skott, 2005, p. 216).

The dynamic of issue-ownership during the 2016 presidential primaries reflects in the specific issues each party and each candidate individually have focused its agenda during the race. Gallup conducted a survey from January 21, 2015 to January 25, 2015 and reported that Americans were more interested in having the next president of the United States address the following issues:

The economy	17%
Immigration	14%
Defense/National Defense/Homeland Security	11%
Healthcare/Healthcare costs/Healthcare reform	10%
Terrorism	7%
Education	6%
Jobs/Unemployment	6%
The federal deficit/The budget	6%
Foreign policy/affairs	5%

In theory, a candidate may focus on any issue. However, in order to set the media agenda, candidates need to focus on the issues that are already relevant for the public. Moreover, it would be very difficult to run a campaign with limited amount of time and cover every single issue of

interest. So indeed presidential candidates may talk about the same issues; however, what really influences voters is their particular position on the issue. "Parties and politicians become identified with certain positions and cannot, without loss of credibility and trustworthiness, change these positions opportunistically" (Holler & Skott, 2005, p. 215). This subset of issues highly influences the media agenda with great effects on voters.

So far, it has been discussed that the media sets the agenda in presidential elections when it transfers issue salience to voters. Salience is understood to be the importance given to a particular issue. However, when studying agenda setting effects in presidential elections there is another important factor influencing the voter's opinion: nonsalience. Nonsalience is observed in many elections. It means that neither candidate discusses certain positions on issues therefore the media cannot give them importance in coverage. Although each candidate will certainty have positions on relevant issues, it does not imply that they want to announce them. If candidates cannot predict accurately what portion of voters are for the policy, and how strongly they feel about the policy, they will rather not announce their position. "Announcing positions on such issues can be dangerous. If voters happen to be against a candidate's announced position and they feel very strongly about the issue, the he/she may lose the election only because the announcement on this issue" (Berliant & Knoshi, 2005, p. 130). If candidates are at risk because of their position on certain issues they may not discuss them and a nonsalience result applies. Thus, candidates also have control over the media agenda by shaping it towards the issues they want to talk about.

Agenda Setting and the Internet

There are countless of case studies and research done in the area of news media agenda setting as it pertains to print and television (McCombs, 2004). However, with the advent of the Internet followed by the boom of social media, one wonders if the media agenda's ability to transfer issue salience to the public opinion is possible in the context of social media. The following are case studies in which functions of agenda setting have been analyzed in the internet context.

As McCombs and Shaw (1972) argued, Chapel Hill voters decided at the polls who they thought would be the best candidate during the 1968 US Presidential elections according to those issues they thought were of relevance at that time. Such issues closely correlated to the issues with major coverage on the media. Nevertheless, one could argue that in this modern era of the Internet, of easy flow and accessibility to information, both the public and the media feed from each other to set the government agenda.

Luo (2014) studied how China's Internet users generate buzz on issues in a way that they transfer issue salience to the media agenda influencing sometimes the government agenda in result. His findings showed that the "online public agenda did not have an agenda-setting effect on the government, whereas the government could set the online public agenda on some occasions. Bidirectional agenda-setting influences were found between the online public agenda and the traditional media agenda" (Luo, 2014, p. 1).

In a country like China, where the government fears that freedom of speech and a free flow of information could destroy the legitimacy of the government, major efforts have been made to regulate online content. Despite the government's efforts to control the media by blocking politically sensitive content using key word filtering, Internet users have managed to

create codes and linguistic strategies to express their views. Since the Internet penetration in China had an increment of 40% in the last decade, the government regulations become everyday less and less effective. "As 'netizens' become actively involved in the information dissemination and production process, it has fundamentally changed the platform of public communication and challenged the existing institutional power relations" (Luo, 2014, p. 8).

In addition, China's communist party has always controlled the media agenda in order to promote positive propaganda to new policies and programs. With the increase of the Internet usage, users now have more access to other sources of information than those medium control by the government. This free flow of information has reduced the people's reliance on traditional media and the government's ability to set the agenda forcing, in some cases, major policy changes. When the online public creates interest on a specific issue and massively advocates for it, the media picks up on the issue generating more noise and buzz. This is why the exponential Internet usage in China and the voice of the online public has become too loud to ignore creating an "agenda-setting force that makes certain social and political issues more salient" (Luo, 2014).

Agenda Setting and Twitter

Social networking has generally been perceived as a tool for family and friends to stay connected and interact online. This interaction is general private or semi-private as users may choose to share their information only with their friends. Social media channels such as Facebook have received pressure to strengthen their security (Facebook, 2010). However, Twitter has always placed an emphasis on being a public medium. "When you need to know what's going on—in your town or across the globe—get the best of what's happening now on Twitter" (About Us, 2016). The vast majority of Twitter accounts are created for public viewing, free for all to see, search and analyze. This discourse can be considered as a sample of

conversations from all different types of demographics, making this channel an "indirect measurement of topics that salient to the general public" (Vargo, 2011, p.11). According to Vargo (2011) Twitter has become the ninth most populated website on the Internet and is still gaining users at exponential rates. Its biggest demographic age consists of 33% 25-34 year-olds, 53% of women, and 51% of white population.

With the advent of the Internet and the boom of social media, it has become clear that news organizations need to shift their strategies into digital journalism. According to a new report by Nielsen, "the number of U.S. homes that have broadband Internet, but only free, broadcast TV, is on the rise" (Perez, 2012). Research conducted by the American Press Institute suggests new generations of voters, Millenials specifically, rely on social media as their main source of information. "Millenials use a variety of social networks for news and information, especially Facebook" (2016). In fact, according to the study 88% of Millenials get news from Facebook while about 34% rely on Twitter. Nonetheless, while Twitter is significantly less popular overall than Facebook, it is a different kind of platform more popular among younger Millenials. "Twitter is a place to learn about what people in general are talking about, not just the lives of people they know" (2016). For instance, the number one reason these twitter users say they utilize the social media platform is to see what or who is "trending" and what people are talking about (43%). Along with getting news, fewer than half cite sharing content (42%), seeing what is trending or what people are talking about on social media (35%). In addition, about half (49%) of these Twitter-using Millenials say they regularly read or watch news stories or headlines posted there, although fewer composed their own tweets about something news related (26%).

It has been discussed that scholars (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2010) found that newspapers tend to have more influence in transferring salience from the media agenda to the public agenda than television or radio news broadcasts. TV news organizations which are partly controlled by the government diminish their own credibility in the eyes of the public. This is why government independent TV news organizations, such as CNN, need to develop trust and reliability among its audiences (Graber, 1984). Moreover, according to Gallup, new generations of Americans have expressed their lack of trust for the mainstream media leaving news media organizations no other choice but to utilize other channels to set the agenda (2016).

Kushin (2010) in "Tweeting the Issues in the Age of Social Media? Intermedia Agenda Setting Between the New York Times and Twitter," explores the argument that social media, specifically twitter, has a direct influence on news media agenda. Over the course of a week, data from the *New York Times* online and twitter account were gathered daily in order to be content analyzed to find if there was a bi-directional intermedia agenda setting between the two.

Results of the cross-correlation showed feeble intermedia agenda setting between the *New York Times* online publication and twitter (Kushin, 2010). Specifically, issues such as the economy, the military, national security and terrorism were found to have subtle influence of intermedia agenda setting between the online newspaper platform and twitter. Such results, in this particular case, demonstrate that the news media agenda and the social media agenda are often similar. However, even though their agendas might be similar it does not imply that their effects on public opinion are the same.

A quantitative study conducted by Dr. Chris Vargo of the University of Alabama extended agenda setting into a new digital medium, Twitter. Vargo (2011) explored tweets as independent variables affecting public salience while utilizing newspapers, national television

and newscasts as the dependent variables. The study aimed to determine whether the independent variables were sufficient predictors for the dependent variables. According to Vargo (2011) "twitter provides a unique opportunity for agenda setting scholars as a new source of public opinion" (p. 2). Twitter stores and frees information posted by users that can be measured in quantifiable mode making issues easier to be tracked much like a news archive. In contrast, all other information in social networking sites, such as Facebook, are usually private and are much difficult to track and measure. Vargo (2011) concluded that there was a mild relationship between media salience and public salience as it defined it. This support "echoes the agenda-setting research of the past that states traditional mass media outlets affect and set the agenda of the publics that listen to them" (Vargo, 2011, p.3).

In 2008, President Barack Obama successfully used the Internet to reach voters and organize supporters in "groundbreaking" ways (Twitter, 2016). During his first term, the president used social media platforms like Twitter to stay connected with Americans, share personal and policy insights, as well as respond to breaking news in real time. In 2012, when he announced his re-election, he posted a video campaign titled "It Begins with Us" on his website and social media channels. The biggest challenges for the Obama campaign were to mobilize supporters, engage undecided voter and shape the public conversation around his election. In order to do it, the team needed to reach target audiences in the places (channels) where they already spent the majority of their time. Pulizzi (2014) refers to this strategy as content marketing. "Content marketing is about delivering the content your audience is seeking in all the places they are searching for it" (p. 5). This "process of developing and sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to a target audience with the goal of acquiring new costumers or increasing business from existing customers" is a concept that if utilized effectively can be very

beneficial for any business including news media organizations and political candidates (Pulizzi, 2014). The campaign was able to capitalize on the creation of effective content marketing by turning to Twitter Ads to "own the election conversation at every step if his campaign" (Twitter, 2016). The Obama campaign promoted tweets in timelines and distributed messages in the President's authentic voice. During every televised presidential debate, @BarackObama created a two-screen experience using Twitter. This method kept Twitter followers or mobile users without cable access to engage during the debate. Promoted tweets drove critical response efforts, such as voter registration, email list building and get-out-the-vote outreach encouraging supporters to take action offline.

On November 5, Barack Obama won the election and second term as president. According to Nathaniel Lubin, Director of Digital Media Marketing for the Obama campaign, Twitter Ads helped them "take advantage of important moments throughout the race and reach as many potential supporters as possible" (Twitter, 2016). The team tweeted a celebratory picture photo of the President and the First Lady embracing the joy and relief of the moment. The tweet spread quickly on Twitter and became the most retweeted tweet in history with more than 800,000 retweets.

Moreover, not only presidential candidates utilize Twitter in ways that may indicate functions of agenda setting. Pulizzi (2014) claims "twitter has become the official broadcasting tool of the web" (p. 233). It is used by all kinds of organizations, including news media, to compel audiences and spread their content. However, despite President Barack Obama's campaign success via Twitter, there is little evidence of agenda setting functions of news organizations' twitter accounts that may affect electoral outcomes.

In a study of public policy opinion, digital trace data was analyzed to measure politics-related Twitter activity with election results and trends in opinion polls. Various studies have already proposed the possibility of inferring public opinion based on digital trace data collected on Twitter and even the possibility of predicting electoral results based on aggregates of mentions (Jungherr, Schoen, Posegga &Jürgens, 2014). However, the study concluded that digital trace collected on Twitter was more of an indicator of attention toward politics rather than political support. "In all tested metrics, indicators based on Twitter mentions of political parties differed strongly from parties' results in elections or opinion polls" (Jungherr, Schoen, Posegga &Jürgens, 2014).

Nonetheless, much work remains to be done about the agenda setting effects of news organizations' twitter accounts. For this particular study, CNN was chosen due to being one of the cable news' twitter account with the most followers. As of April 2016, @CNN has 24.7 million followers and has tweeted 84.1 thousand times (@CNN, 2016). As of 2011, CNN was the leading TV news organization on having the largest number of separate feeds (Pew Research Center, 2011). It is also among the newspapers and broadcasting media that tweet and engage the most with its followers. It is also one of the top five twitter accounts with the highest percentage of original tweets than retweets. This represent their independent voice and their focus on constant news creation.

Nonetheless, their audience reach via twitter is worldwide and engages millions of people on a daily basis. People from all countries and languages can easily follow their day to day news, get constant updates on their smartphones, and share tweets with their contacts, thus spreading their agenda. According to new research about TV consumption, it could be argued that CNN's twitter account might even have a greater reach than CNN's TV coverage. According to Pew

Research Institute, "50% of cell phone owners engage in content on their cell phones while they watch video or television content" (2014). In addition, *Time* magazine conducted a study of 5,000 international cell phone or smartphone owners in which 84% said that they could not go a single day without their cell phones. Also, 50% of Americans said they sleep with their phone next to them from which 80% were 18 to 24-year-olds. Via all the twitter platforms of CNN: @CNN, @cnnbrk (breaking news), @CNNPolitics, @CNNOpinion, @CNNnewsroom, @CNNsports. users can be constantly informed and updated on issues without having to tune in on the TV.

Moreover, according to Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings, "Twitter conversation about live TV in the U.S. has grown dramatically in recent years – 19 million unique people in the U.S. composed 263 million Tweets about live TV in Q2 2013 alone, a 24 percent year-over-year increase in authors and a 38 percent increase in Tweet volume" (2016). This represents 50 times more live tweets than people watching. These statistics are a clear indicator of what people are talking and interest about. However, since the number of tweets is so exponential and does not represent the actual number of people tweeting, it might be a simple indicator of public interest and Vargo (2011) suggested. Assuming that CNN's twitter followers are potential voters during the Super Tuesday primaries; CNN's twitter agenda may influence their opinion by transferring candidate salience to the public. The salience or nonsalience of issues among voters due to the news media twitter agenda contributes substantially to the research of media agenda setting.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Primarily, this study seeks to answer if news organizations use their Twitter feeds in presidential elections in ways that indicate functions of agenda setting. For that reason, world famous broadcasting news organization, CNN, was chosen to be the main subject of study. Since 2010, @CNNBrk and @CNN have been at the top of the most followed news twitter accounts charts. Specifically, @CNN is considered one of the 10 top accounts to follow on Twitter for breaking news (Stadd, 2013). With such vast amount of people following their day to day coverage this researcher hypothesized that CNN's twitter account will influence the 2016 Super Tuesday primaries results by attributing more mentions to a particular GOP and Democratic presidential candidate from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016.

With these research questions in mind, a qualitative method was utilized in order to study CNN's twitter effects on voters during Super Tuesday 1, 2 and 3. This method will determine any agenda setting indications of @CNN's coverage. The coverage compared with the results of each Super Tuesday will determine the effects on voters.

As the literature suggests, there is a significant increment on the need for agenda setting research as it pertains to the effects of Twitter in electoral outcomes. Although it is a fairly new social media channel, levels of agenda setting have been observed on various case studies. Twitter has been used by presidential candidates in order to set the media agenda in the context of presidential elections. However, it is not clear if news organization utilize Twitter in way that indicate agenda setting functions. It is also pertinent to qualitative studies, such as this one, because all the data is accessible online and serves the purpose of a massive public data archive.

All data was collected daily via Twitonomy.com. The number of tweets and percentages of the people @CNN mentions the most from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016 are displayed in pie charts. After all the data was collected, it was used to create a histogram of @CNN mentions of the candidates running for the presidency during the period of the study. Since the agenda setting theory states that the more the media covers an issue, the more relevance it will have among the public. The dependent variable is measured by the amount of coverage (mentions or tweets) given to the presidential candidates. The independent variable pertains to the date of twitter coverage (February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016).

Data Capture

The number of @CNN tweets given to each presidential candidate were analyzed during the period of Super Tuesday 1, 2 and 3. All data was collected daily starting on February 23rd 2016 until March 15th 2016.

The independent variable: @CNN number of mentions of presidential candidates. The dependent variable: Tweets made on February 23, February 24, February 25, February 26, February 27, February 28, February 29, March 1 (Super Tuesday 1), March 2, March 3, March 4, March 5, March 6, March 7, March 8 (Super Tuesday 2), March 9, March 10, March 11, March 12, March 13, March 14, and March 15 (Super Tuesday 3) of the year 2016.

Chapter 4

Results

In the course of three weeks, 21 election primaries were held across the United States, three Super Tuesdays in total. Daily twitter analytics data was gathered from @CNN starting February 23, 2016 through March 15, 2016. Data shows charts of the people @CNN mentioned the most during each day leading to a particular Super Tuesday primary. In order to identify any indication of transference of salience, on another issue that was not a presidential candidate, the hashtags used the most were also collected. At the end of each section, the results of the presidential candidates that won the most delegates on its respective Super Tuesday are presented. Moreover, an average of all the @CNN twitter mentions of the presidential candidates during the three weeks of study was collected. The purpose was to determine any agenda setting trends during the three weeks of Super Tuesday primaries and possibly predict the two general election nominees, if levels of agenda setting are observed.

Daily Results of @CNN Mentions Leading to Super Tuesday 1

Super Tuesday 1 was held in 12 states on March 1, 2016. It included elections for both the GOP and Democratic parties. The states that voted on Super Tuesday 1 were: Alabama, Alaska, American Samoa, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia. Twitter analytics data were gathered daily from February 23, 2016 to March 1, 2016. An average of the data from the whole week and the results of Super Tuesday's first primary are shown at the end of this section.

Tuesday, February 23 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (18.8%), @BernieSanders (15.9%), @HillaryClinton (13%), @JohnKasich

(10.1%) via Twitonomy.com
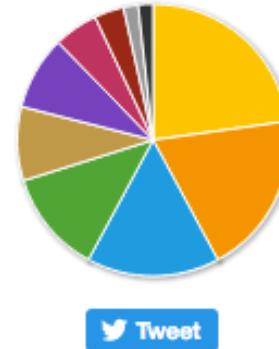
Wednesday, February 24 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (26%), @BernieSanders (24.7%), @HillaryClinton (15.1%), @tedcruz (4.1%) via Twitonomy.com
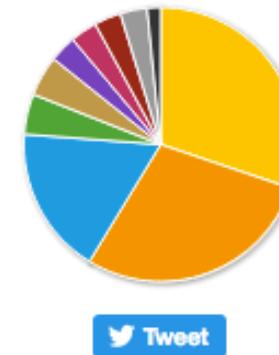
Thursday, February 25, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTump (37.2%), @tedcruz (9.3%), @marcorubio (7%), @HillaryClinton (4.7%) via Twitonomy.com
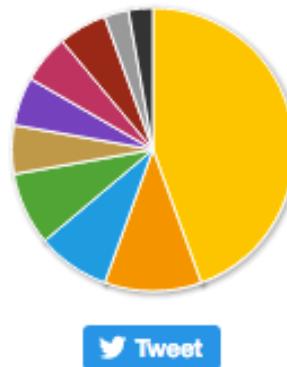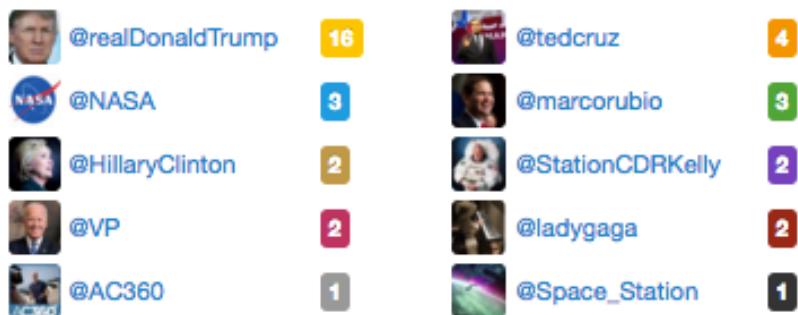
Friday, February 26 2016. The 2016 presidential candidate @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (40.4%), @marcorubio (16.3%), @tedcruz (12.5%), @RealBenCarson

(4.8%).
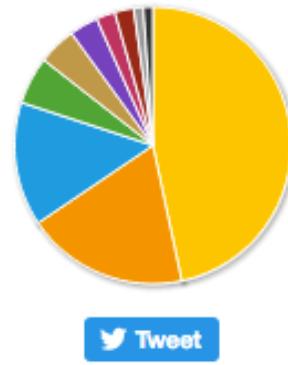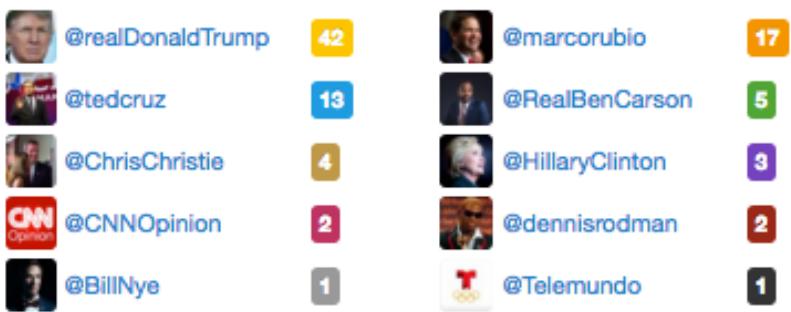
Saturday, February 27 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (27.7%), @ChrisChristie (4.5%), @HillaryClinton (4.5%)
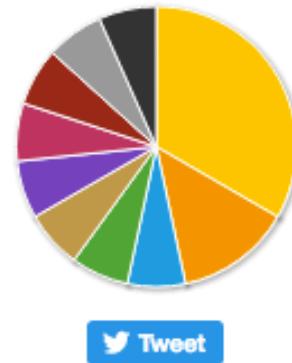
Sunday, Feb. 28 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (39.3%), @HillaryClinton (21.4%), @JohnKasich (14.3%), @tedcruz (14.3%)
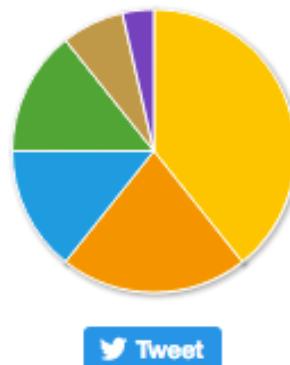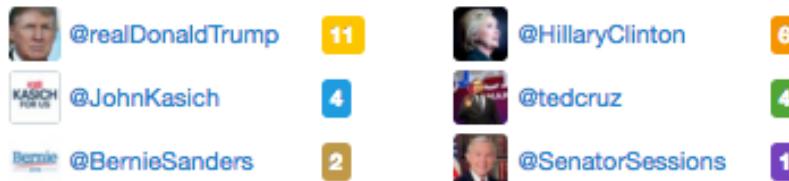
Monday, February 29 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (21.3%), @HillaryClinton (4.9%), @marcorubio (3.3%), @BernieSanders (3.3%)
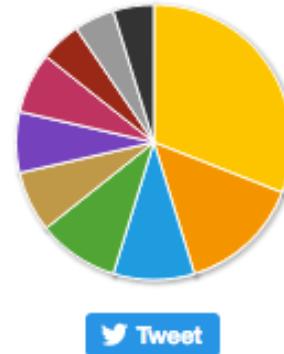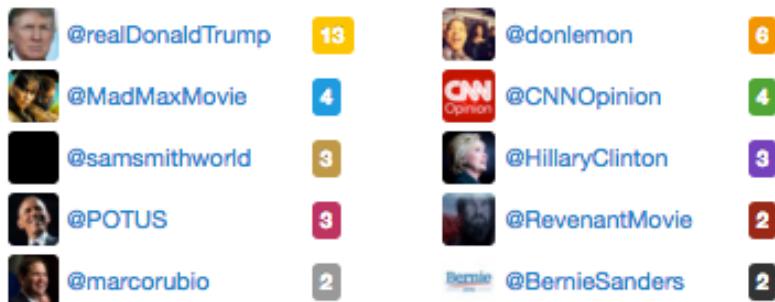
Super Tuesday 1 day: Tuesday, March 1 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (37.3%), @HillaryClinton (8.5%), @RealBenCarson (3.4%), @JohnKasich (1.7%).
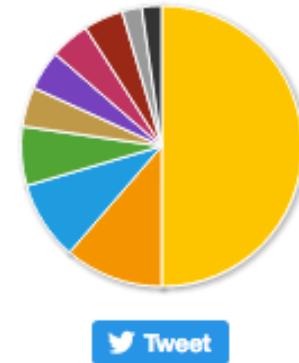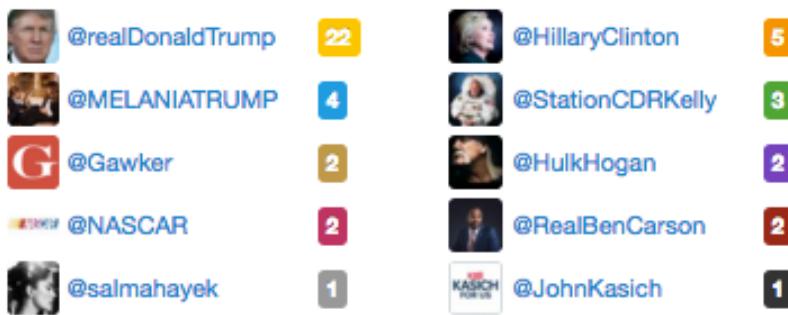
Daily Results of @CNN Mentions Leading to Super Tuesday 2

The second Super Tuesday primary was held on March 8, 2016 the week after Super Tuesday 1 in four states across the United States. The states voting on Super Tuesday 2 were: Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan and Mississippi. Although there were Republican presidential primaries and caucuses in all four states, only two held Democratic presidential primaries. Twitter analytics data was gathered daily from March 2, 2016 to March 8, 2016. An average of the data

from the whole week and the results of Super Tuesday's second primary are shown at the end of

this section.

Wednesday, March 2 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (24.1%), @BernieSanders (17.7%), @HillaryClinton (11.4%), @tedcruz

(7.6%).
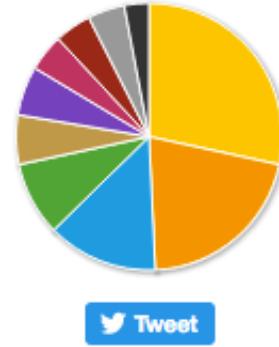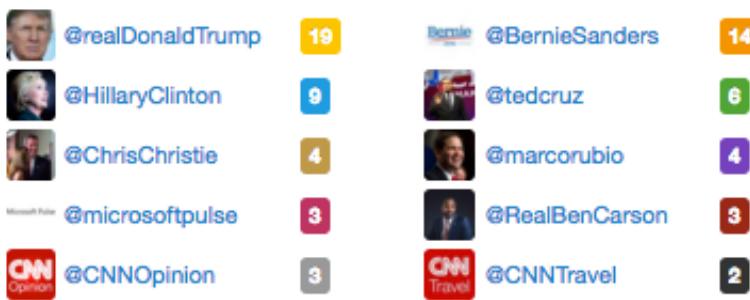
Thursday, March 3 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (44.1%), @HillaryClinton (8.5%), @tedcruz (1.7%).
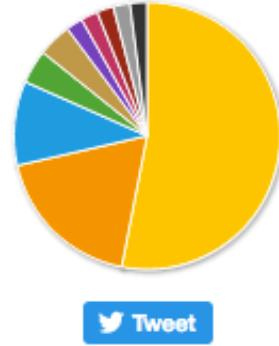
Friday, March 4 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (38.9.1%), @JohnKasich (5.6%), @RealBenCarson (4.2%),

@HillaryClinton (2.8%).
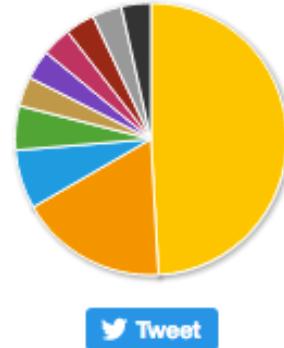
Saturday, March 5 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (18.8%), @tedcruz (9.4%), @marcorubio (9.4%), @BernieSanders (6.3%).
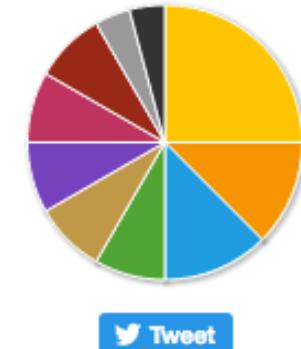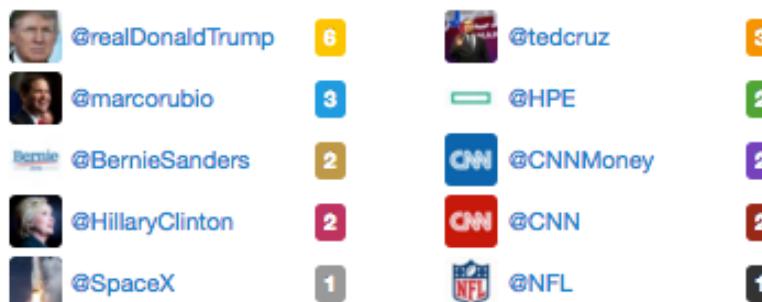

Sunday, March 6 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (23.1%), @BernieSanders (19.2%), @HillaryClinton (17.3%),

@marcorubio (13.5%), @tedcruz (7.7%)
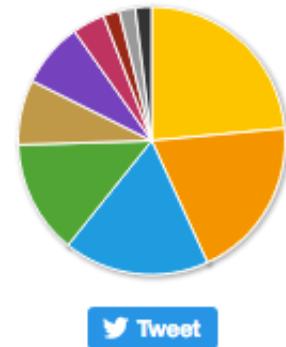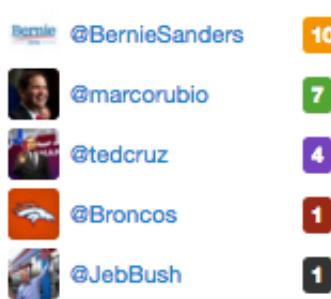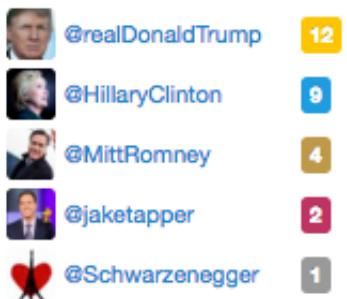
Monday, March 7, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @BernieSanders (31.5%), @HillaryClinton (25.9%), @realDonaldTrump (7.4%), @marcorubio (5.6%)
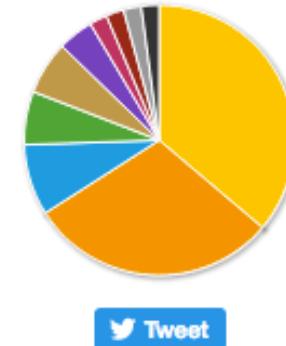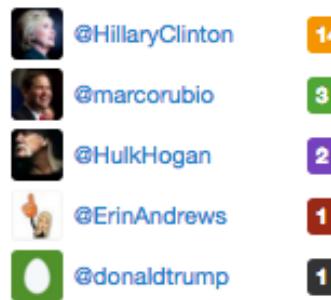
Super Tuesday 2. Tuesday, March 8, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (17.8%), @BernieSanders (15.6%), @HillaryClinton (8.9%), @marcorubio (6.7%)
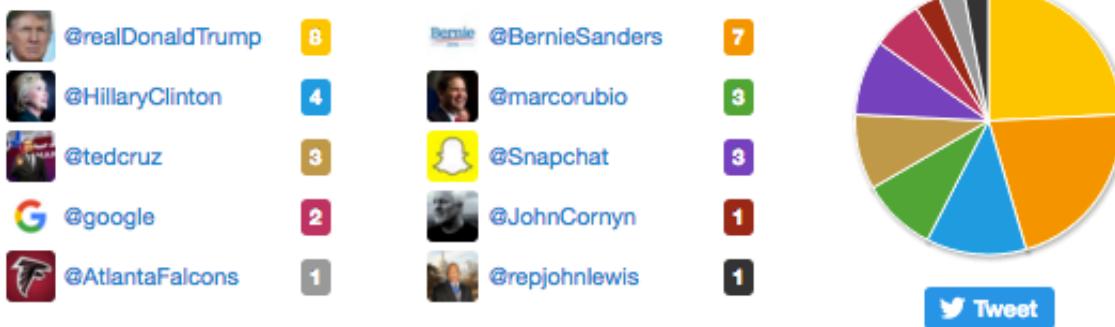
Average data from March 2, 2016 to March 8, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (30.7%), @HillaryClinton (8.7%), @BernieSanders (7.8%), @tedcruz (7%), @marcorubio (5.2%), @JohnKasich (2.6%)

Daily Results of @CNN Mentions Leading to Super Tuesday 3

The third Super Tuesday primary was held on March 15, 2016, the week after Super Tuesday 2 in five states and one U.S. common wealth. The states voting on Super Tuesday 3 were: Florida, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio. The U.S. common wealth voting was the Northern Mariana Islands which had nine delegates at stake. Both Republican and Democratic presidential primaries were held in all states. The U.S. common wealth of the Northern Islands hold a democratic caucus on March 12. Twitter analytics data was gathered daily from March 9, 2016 to March 15, 2016. An average of the data from the whole week and the results of Super Tuesday's third primary are presented in this section.

Wednesday, March 9, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most: @realDonaldTrump (17.8%), @HillaryClinton (8.9%), @BernieSanders (15.6%), @tedcruz (6.7%)

Thursday, March 10, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (35.8%), @BernieSanders (7.4%), @marcorubio (6.2%), @tedcruz (6.2%)

Friday, March 11, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (33.3%), @JohnKasich (11.1%), @marcorubio (11.1%), @tedcruz (8.9%)
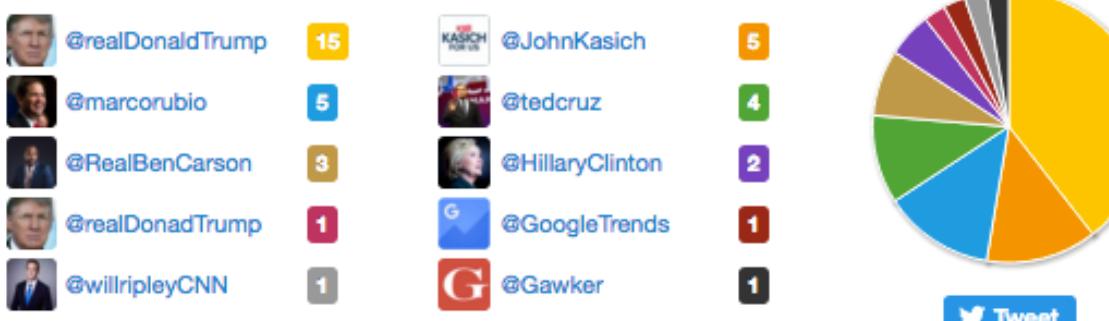
Saturday, March 12, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (18.5%), @BernieSanders (7.4%), @Hillary Clinton (3.7%)
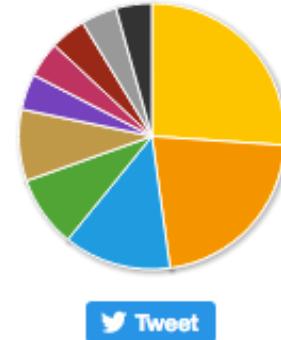
Sunday, March 13, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@BernieSanders (33.3%), @Hillary Clinton (33.3%) via Twitonomy.com
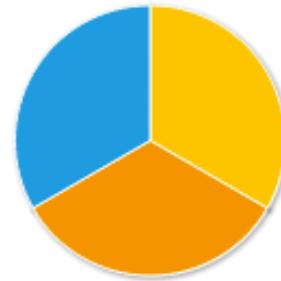
Monday, March 14, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (27.8%), @RealBenCarson (5.6%), @HillaryClinton (5.6%), @marcorubio

(5.6%), @BernieSanders (5.6%) via Twitonomy.com

Tuesday, March 15, 2016. The 2016 presidential candidates @CNN mentions the most:

@realDonaldTrump (33.3%), @marcorubio (13.3%), @RealBenCarson (6.7%),

@HillaryClinton (6.7%) via Twitonomy.com
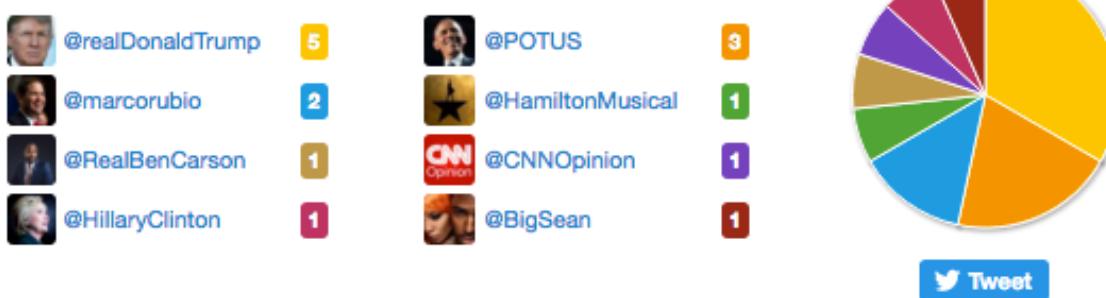
Results of @CNN's Twitter Mentions from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016.

The following are the averages of all of the twitter data gathered during the three 2016

Super Tuesday Primaries. Data shows the percentages of the candidates that were mentioned the

most throughout three weeks of the twitter coverage. The results of the three Super Tuesdays

indicate which candidate of each party respectively lead the @CNN coverage. Sen. Sanders leads

the Democratic Party and Trump leads the GOP. The following data shows the people @CNN

mentioned the most from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2015. Data shows seven out of the 10

people most mentioned throughout this period were presidential candidates.

February 23, 2016-March 15, 2016. The 2016 Presidential Candidates @CNN mentions

the most: @realDonaldTrump (28.6%), @BernieSanders (9.5%), @HillaryClinton (9.3%),

@tedcruz (6%), @marcorubio (5.6%)

After gathering all the daily results from @CNN mentions via Twitonomy.com, these

were placed in a histogram in order to identify any levels of agenda setting. This data was

contrast with the results from the Super Tuesday primary 1, 2, 3. The dependent variable is

measured by the amount of coverage (mentions or tweets) given to the presidential candidates.

The independent variable pertains to the date of twitter coverage (February 23, 2016 to March

15, 2016).
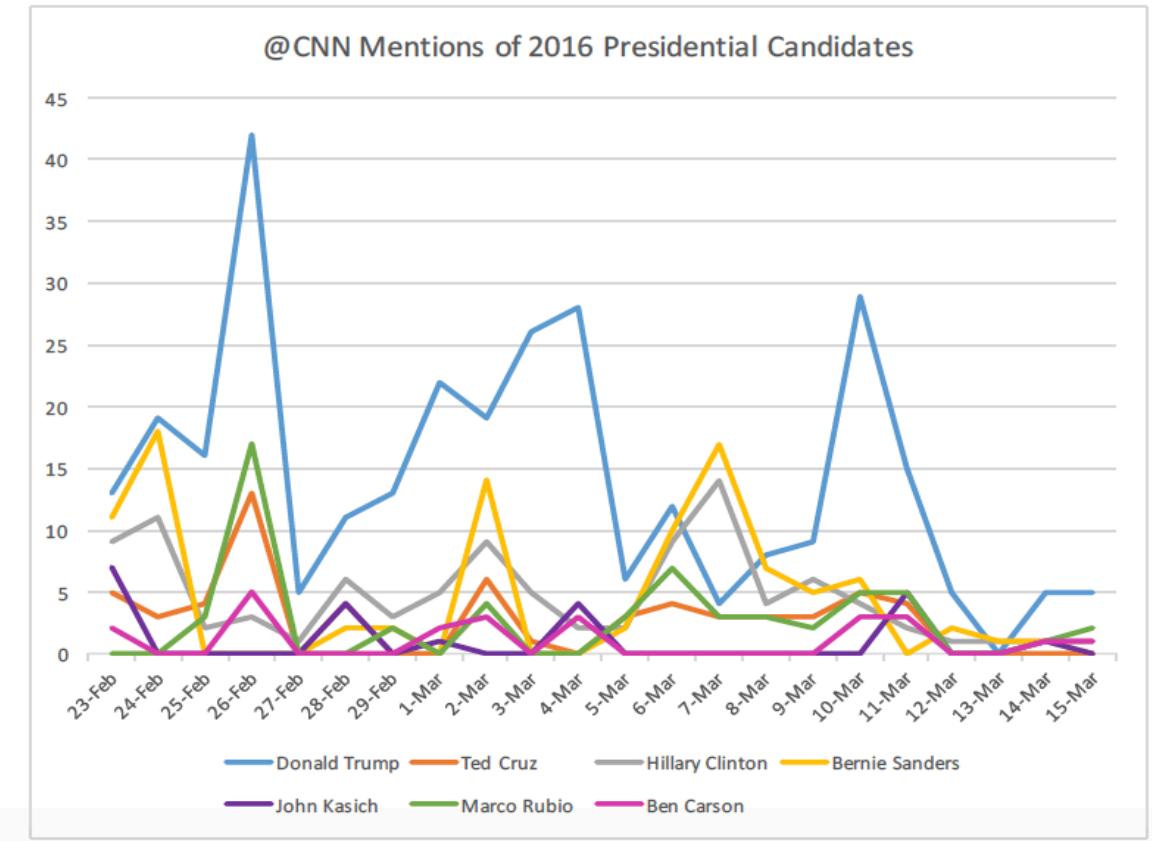
Results Super Tuesday Primary 1

Super Tuesday 1 Results: After the polls closed, AP reported the GOP candidate who won the most delegates on Super Tuesday 1 was Donald Trump with 254 delegates. Trump won the states of: Alabama (43%), Arkansas (33%), Georgia (39%), Massachusetts (49%), Tennessee (39%), Virginia (35%), Vermont (33%). Senator Ted Cruz won Alaska (36%), Oklahoma (34%), Texas (44%). Senator Marco Rubio won Minnesota (36%).

The Democratic presidential candidate who won the most delegates out of the 11 states voting Democratic was former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, with 514 delegates. Clinton won seven states: Alabama (78%), Arkansas (66%), Georgia (71%), Massachusetts (50%), Tennessee (66%), Texas (65%), Virginia (64%). Senator Bernie Sanders won the four states of Colorado (59%), Minnesota (62%), Oklahoma (52%), Vermont (86%).

Results Super Tuesday Primary 2

After the polls closed, the Huffington post reported the GOP candidate who won the most delegates on Super Tuesday 2 was Trump with 73 delegates. Trump won three of the four states voting: Hawaii (43.4%), Michigan (36.5%), and Mississippi (47.3%). Senator Cruz won Idaho (45.4%).

The Democratic presidential candidate who won the most delegates out of the two states voting for a Democratic nominee was Clinton, with a total of 108 delegates and super delegates. Although Sanders and Clinton won one state each, all super delegates have already accounted their votes for Clinton. Clinton won Mississippi by 82.6% of all the delegates accounted for. Sen. Sanders won Michigan by 49.8%.

Results Super Tuesday Primary 3

After the polls closed, the Huffington post reported the GOP candidate who won the most delegates on Super Tuesday 3 was Donald Trump with 207 delegates. Trump won four out of the five states voting including the U.S. common wealth: Florida (45.7%), Illinois (38.8%), Missouri (40.9%), North Carolina (40.2%), Northern Mariana Islands (9%). Governor John Kasich won Ohio (46.8%).

The Democratic presidential candidate who won the most delegates out of the five states voting for a Democratic nominee was Clinton, with a total of 462 delegates and super delegates. All super delegates accounted from all states have already pledged support to Clinton. Clinton won all of the five states voting in Super Tuesday 3: Florida (64.4%), Illinois (50.5%), Missouri (49.6%), North Carolina (54.6%), Ohio (56.5%).

Presidential Candidate	# Mentions	# Delegates	# Delegates per. mentions
Donald Trump	312	534	1.71
Bernie Sanders	104	711	6.83
Hillary Clinton	101	1,084	10.73
Ted Cruz	66	328	4.96
Marco Rubio	61	120	1.96
John Kasich	26	119	4.57
Ben Carson	23	3	0.13

Table 4. 1

Chapter 5

Discussion

Overview of Interpretation of Findings

This section discusses the interpretation of the data collected via Twitonomy.com from @CNN focusing on each presidential candidate mentioned during February 23, 2016 through March 15, 2016. GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump was mentioned the most during the course of the study. In fact, 20 days out of the 23 days analyzed, Trump led CNN's twitter coverage of people over anyone else. Results from the primaries indicate Trump as the winner of most of the delegates at stake on each Super Tuesday: 254 Super Tuesday 1, 72 Super Tuesday 2, and 207 Super Tuesday 3. In total, Trump received 544 delegates in the course of three weeks which is 43% out of the 1,237 necessary delegates any GOP candidate needs in order to win the nomination.

Senator Bernie Sanders also had a significant amount of coverage. Results indicated he had the most mentions of the Democratic Party. However, Sen. Sanders did not win the majority of the states during the Super Tuesday primaries nor the majority of delegates. There is also a particular caveat to consider which is the fact that Hillary Clinton has the support of most of the super delegates of the nation who are not influenced by Twitter. In order to see who actually garnered the most votes, one should solely focus on the delegates earned per state which represent the influence of @CNN on the ordinary voter. It is established that the Democratic candidates need 2,383 delegates in order to win the nomination. Results showed Clinton winning about 45% of the delegates needed to win the nomination while Sanders won 30%.

Ted Cruz's mentions peaked at the beginning of the week prior to the first Super Tuesday primary held on March 1, 2016. However, the mentions dropped significantly by the end of the

week while Trump got more and more mentions as the days went by. Results from the first Super Tuesday primary indicated Cruz as the winner of three states and a total of 218 delegates while Trump won seven states and a total of 254 delegates.

Data indicates former Secretary of State and Democratic Party candidate, Hillary Clinton, had the most consistent amount of daily mentions out of all the candidates. Nonetheless, CNN's twitter mentions of Clinton began to declined significantly after the second Super Tuesday primary, March 8, leading to Super Tuesday 3. The results from Super Tuesday 3 held on March 15, 2016 showed Clinton winning 57% of all the delegate accounted for with a total of 396 delegates out of the 691 delegates at stake.

GOP presidential candidate and Ohio Governor, John Kasich had little to no coverage after Super Tuesday 2 and leading up to Super Tuesday 3. Despite the lack of twitter mentions before the third Super Tuesday, Kasich won Ohio, his home state and first win in the race. Kasich won a total of 66 delegates this day out of the 358 delegates at stake (18%). Nonetheless, Trump, who was mentioned the most during this week, won 219 delegates which represent 61% of the delegates at stake.

Senator Marco Rubio's mentions seemed to peak in a fairly consistent way after Super Tuesday 1. However, the number of mentions remained low throughout the week before and after Super Tuesday 2 where he won 1 delegate out of 150. Mentions did not increase significantly on the week leading to Super Tuesday 3 where he lost his home state of Florida and dropped out of the presidential race.

Retired neurosurgeon and politician, Doctor Ben Carson, had four peaks throughout the time of this study. Nonetheless, the number of mentions remained fairly low leading to Super

Tuesday 1. Dr. Carson dropped out from the presidential race after winning 3 delegates out of 595 at stake.

Discussion of Implications of Method

In order to identify CNN's twitter agenda during three 2016 Super Tuesday primaries, a simple yet effective Twitter analytics tool, Twitonomy.com, was utilized to collect the necessary data on a daily basis. The premium version was purchased in order to access insightful data, charts and visual analysis of CNN's twitter account. Twitonomy.com is a tool used by "a wide range of organizations, including brands, agencies and social media professionals. Twitonomy Premium clients include global public relations and communications firm Burson-Marsteller, the Australian government, the French government (Fondation de France), Orange, and Shazam" (Rayson, 2014).

There are three main implications of the method applied in this research. First, it is the validity of the data. Since all the data is extracted directly from CNN's twitter account, it accurately reflects all the percentages of retweets, followers, hashtags, and mentions. Second, the method is reliable. The same results should be obtained if obtained by a different researcher using a different analytical tool (Taylor, Gibbs, & Lewins, 2005). The same applies to the results of the Super Tuesday primaries since they were reported by reliable news sources and fact checked by the Associated Press. Third, the analysis of data implies that there are more variables needed in order to accurately suggest that the number of mentions per candidate had a direct correlation with Super Tuesday electoral outcomes.

Discussion Implications of Research Questions

R1. Do news organizations use their twitter accounts in ways that indicate functions of agenda setting? According to the data collected it is clear that CNN attributed more mentions to a particular candidate over the others. It is clear that during the course of this study Trump not only had more coverage than other presidential candidate but more coverage than any other person. Overall, the twitter metrics gathered from CNN's account as it pertains to the people who was mentioned the most are a clear indicator of media interest on a particular subject. Therefore, one could suggest that CNN, one of the leading news organizations in the world, does utilize its twitter account in ways that indicate functions of agenda setting. However, these functions pertain exclusively to the first-level of agenda setting which refers to the object (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004). In other words, the "first-level of agenda setting deals with the transfer of object salience from the mass media to the public" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972., Cheng, 2014, p. 6). Since the concept is based on how the media impacts audience perceptions about what issues are worthy of attention by focusing on a single political figure, the assumption of agenda setting functions on CNN's twitter account is valid.

Moreover, based on the results and the method of the study one cannot assume CNN's twitter account set the agenda in other levels since the specific content of the tweets was not analyzed. As McCombs and Shaw (1972) suggested, the "media forces the public attention" towards certain issues and builds up public images of political figures (including candidates). This constant presentation of issues or people suggests what the public "should think about, know about, and have feeling about" (p. 177). Besides giving more importance to a certain candidate over the others, it is not clear whether the mentions of Donald Trump, or any other candidate for that matter, were positive or negative. Without a clear understanding of the specific

content of the tweets, there is little evidence to assume the number of mentions transferred salience to the public as to what to think, feel, or know about the candidates.

H1. CNN's twitter account will influence the Super Tuesday primaries results by attributing more mentions to a particular GOP and Democratic presidential candidate respectively, form February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016.

First of all, the results do indicate that GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump had an enormous amount of coverage in regards to the rest of the candidates. The results from the Super Tuesday primary 1, 2 and 3 show Trump as the candidate who won the most delegates from his party. Nonetheless, despite receiving the majority of mentions by @CNN, he did not win the majority of delegates out of all the candidates mentioned. In fact, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, won a significant majority of the delegates at stake during the three Super Tuesdays. However, Clinton did not receive as much coverage as her Democratic opponent Bernie Sanders.

Moreover, this hypothesis is based on the second-level of agenda setting which examines the transference of attributed salience of issues from the news media agenda to the public agenda. Specifically, "it focuses on the attributes, characteristics and properties of an object" (Kim & McCombs, 2007., Chang, 2014, p. 9). This attribution describes the object (issue or person) and the tone of its coverage.

It is clear that the results do not clearly indicate a second-level of agenda setting in its first substantive dimension because they do not specify if the attribute of the mentions help the public to cognitively structure and discern the candidates. In addition, the results do not indicate a second-level of agenda setting in its affective dimension since there is no evidence of the tone of how the mentions were written (positive, negative or neutral).

Another variable to consider is that the number of mentions per candidate does not mirror the number of delegates each candidate received. For instance, Clinton won 1084 delegates and had 101 mentions throughout the period of this study. That means on average each time Clinton was mentioned she would win 10 delegates. Now, if that was true presidential candidates should really focus their attention on making their names prominent on news organizations' twitter accounts. Although, results indicate that Sen. Sanders, who won 711 delegates and was mentioned 104 times, won meaning he earned 6 delegates every time he was mentioned. It is true that only three more mentions above Clinton is not a significant difference on coverage. However, a 373 difference of delegates is very significant, even more when each candidate is trying to get as many delegates as possible in order to secure the nomination for their party. So, how is it possible that Sen. Sanders had more mentions but won less delegates? One could argue that the main reason is the fact that all the super delegates (included in the total count of delegates) already pledged support for Clinton. But, it seems that the results of the number of mentions in correlation to the number of delegates do not mirror each other for the Republican candidates as well. Trump, had four times more mentions than Ted Cruz and in result, one could argue, he won four times more delegates. However, Trump only had 206 more delegates than Cruz. If the number of mentions would equal the number of delegates, Trump should have won 1,312 delegates instead (four times Ted Cruz's delegates). See figure 4.1.

Overall, results indicate that in order to prove this hypothesis more context is necessary. The actual content of the tweets should be analyzed to determine what attribute @CNN gave to each particular candidate. Also, there is one significant limitation in the study in terms of transference of issue salience. The data does not indicate which voters, if any, were influenced by CNN's twitter account. In other words, the method did not measure how many out of the

22,102 CNN's followers went to the polls during Super Tuesday 1, 2 or 3 to vote. Therefore, based on the method applied, the hypothesis lacks support.

Limitations of Method

One of the main limitations of the method of this study is the lack of direct evidence that @CNN did in fact affect voters on Super Tuesday 1, 2 and 3 by attributing more mentions to a candidate. This limitation is mainly due to the assumption that @CNN's followers, who are the ones directly exposed to their coverage, could be potential voters. Nonetheless, without insights on the demographics of the reach of each tweet it is not possible to sufficiently justify such a claim.

Another limitation of the method is that it excluded the actual content of the mentions, in turn, excluding any results that could indicate a transference of attributed issue salience. In addition, the method was limited due to the lack of context the data provided. There could have been external factors influencing @CNN's agenda such as the Republican debate, or the Democratic Town Hall held during the period of the study. In addition, the possibility that a certain presidential candidate influenced directly the @CNN agenda by causing daily controversies or by simply being the "underdog" is not measured by the method. This limitation is very significant as it would indicate that Donald Trump successfully gained the media attention throughout the period of the study and in turn setting the @CNN twitter agenda. In such case, it could be concluded that presidential candidates can set the news media Twitter agenda in order to gain relevance among the public discourse and influence voters during presidential elections.

This particular claim would need to be further analyzed as it also relates to previous case studies on President Barack Obama who successfully managed to shape the media and public

conversations using his own Twitter account during the 2012 presidential campaign. It is clear that the theory of agenda setting relates to the transference of issue salience from the mass media agenda to the public agenda. However, there is a main factor that may influence the news media agenda during presidential elections known as the insider groups (Lillekers, 2006). So due to the lack of context of the mentions, the answer to who set the @CNN agenda is ambiguous since it can be attributed to "horse racing" journalism or to unknown insider groups.

Despite the accessibility to the data of both dependent and independent variables via Twitonomy.com and the hundreds of studies on the effects of agenda setting during presidential elections, this particular electoral race was still ongoing at the time of writing. Therefore, there are no case studies about the agenda setting effects of news media organization in the 2016 presidential race. Although Twitter is a fairly new social media channel scholars predict it might be close to an end (Topolsky, 2016). This raises the question of the relevance of this study in the communications field if Twitter is no longer relevant in years to come.

Suggestions for Future Research.

There is still a lack of validation of Twitter as an indicator for political support and presidential outcomes. A suggestion for future research is to compare two twitter accounts of news organizations, gather as much daily data as possible in the form of "retweets," "tweets," "likes," and "replies." Then, analyze the data in terms of content in order to identify the attribution given to each particular candidate (second-level agenda setting). If possible, determine whether or not there are two or more elements constantly presented together on average (Network Agenda Setting Model). Complete an in depth demographic analysis of CNN's followers to determine the number of potential voters. Contrast the results not only with electoral outcomes but with polls about the public's views on each candidate. Such polls will

indicate if there were in fact functions of agenda setting as it relates to the transference of issue salience to the news mass media to the public.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In his book, "Public Opinion," Walter Lippmann (1922) first introduced the notion that "the media construct public views of the world" (Chang, 2014, p.5). One of the boldest statements from the renowned newspaper commentator and author, was that ordinary citizens can no longer judge public issues rationally as the mass media constructs interpretations for them. Later on, communication and journalism scholars McCombs and Shaw (1972) developed the concept of agenda setting in "The Agenda Setting Functions of the Mass Media." Their first investigation was made in the context of the 1968 US Presidential Elections. The attempt was to assess the relationship between what voters from Chapel Hill considered to be the most important issues and the content of the media during the campaign. Their conclusions displayed that the mass media exercises a significant role on what voters considered to be the major issues or most important issues in political campaigns. This influence is mainly due to the devoted amount of coverage given to certain issues or political figures by the mass media. Since the study in Chapel Hill, agenda setting has become one of the most studied concepts in media effect research (McCombs, 2005).

Furthermore, there are two prominent levels of agenda setting which describe the transference of issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. The first level refers to the transference of object salience from the mass media to the public. "Objects can be public issues - such as terrorism, crimes, and immigration issues - or public figures – such as presidential election candidates" (Cheng, 2014, p.6). It focuses on how the media impacts the audience perceptions about what issues are worthy of attention. The second level refers to the transference of attributes of salience issue. At this level, the theory focuses on two dimensions:

substantive and affective. These dimensions, focus on the cognitive structure the coverage creates among the public and the tone in which the issue is presented. In other words, it focused on how the issues are covered on the mass media. In addition, there is a new model, Network Agenda Setting Model, that focuses on the interconnected relationship among various issues and their transference of salience to the public (Guo, Vu, & McCombs, 2012). For instance, it considers how if the news mass media constantly present two elements together, the public will perceive those issues as interconnected, for example, "terrorism" and "Muslim."

A new field of research about the agenda-setting theory pertains to the advent of the Internet. This new source of media allows anyone to become a source of information and influence which present a challenge for news media organizations wanting to continue to shape the public's conversation. During the 2008 Presidential Elections, President Barack Obama successfully used the Internet to reach voters and organize supporters in groundbreaking ways. "During his first term, the President used digital platforms like Twitter to stay connected with Americans, share personal and policy insights as well as respond to breaking news in real time" (2016). Through a variety of strategies @BarackObama turned to Twitter ads, trends, compelling video and media content to shape the conversation around his election. Via Twitter, President Obama was able to mobilize supporters, engage undecided voters. It is no secret that Barack Obama's twitter account greatly influenced voter in both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. However, research has not concluded whether or not the twitter accounts of news media organizations have the same capacity to transfer issue of salience to potential voters. This study proposed one research question – do news organizations use their twitter accounts in ways that indicate functions of agenda setting during presidential elections? - and one hypothesis – CNN's twitter account will influence the 2016 Super Tuesday primary results by attributing

more mentions to a particular GOP and Democratic presidential candidate. This hypothesis was based on several case studies which have proven that the mass media does in fact transferences salience of issues (or candidates) to voters.

The study utilized a qualitative method in order to answer the research questions focusing on one of the major news organizations in the world with the most twitter followers, CNN. Data about the number of mentions given to each presidential candidate during a period of three weeks was collected daily via a twitter analytics tool, Twitonomy.com. The period chosen for the study was the week before Super Tuesday 1 (February 23, 2016) until Super Tuesday 3 (March 15,1016). Super Tuesdays are considered a major political turnout for presidential candidates due to the amount of states holding elections which implies many delegates are at stake. It is believed that whoever wins the most delegates during Super Tuesdays not only leads the presidential race but will most likely win the nomination for their parties. Therefore, the period of the study was crucial in order to analyze agenda setting effects in voters. The results from the daily number of mentions were contrasted with the results of each Super Tuesday primary.

The results showed an overwhelmingly majority of mentions dedicated to Donald Trump. Regardless of external factors that might have affected the amount of coverage given to each candidate, it is clear @CNN dominates their twitter account with tweets about presidential candidate Donald Trump. In addition, Trump did win the majority of delegates for his party. Assuming that @CNN transferred salience of Trump to potential voters, the results presented some inconsistencies as it related to the Democratic candidates. Data shows @CNN mentioning slightly more Sen. Sanders over Hillary Clinton. However, despite given more coverage to Sen. Sanders, Clinton won more delegates during the three Super Tuesday by a significant difference.

Moreover, based on the results it was determined that the number of mentions for each candidate and the number of delegates won do not mirror each other. This means that, results do not show a clear transference of candidate salience from the @CNN to potential voters as the randomness of the data seems merely coincidental. It does not seem possible to prove there is a clear probability for a candidate to win a certain number of delegates if mentioned a particular number of times.

In conclusion, CNN's twitter account indicated first level functions of agenda setting in the coverage of the 2016 Super Tuesday primaries. This agenda setting function was noted in the prevalent twitter mentions of presidential candidate Donald Trump. Although the number of delegates won per candidate did not correlate to the number of mentions by @CNN for all of the candidates; the results indicated that @CNN seems to be more an indicator of interest in the media in covering a candidate and the presidential elections than an indicator of support or voter intention. The connection between digital trace data and its influence on public opinion appears to be highly dubious since the results from @CNN not necessarily mirror the election outcomes. "After all, Twitter users tend not to be a representative sample of society at large (Smith and Brenner 2012) and Twitter is a communication environment easily manipulated by campaigns, consultants, or activists" (Mustafaraj et al., 2011., Jungherr, 2015, p. 189).

Nonetheless, it can be argued that @CNN sets the agenda for its coverage as a "horse race." As Boyle (2011) suggested, news media organizations tend to cover presidential campaigns as a "horse race" in order to set the agenda. Results showed a vast majority of mentions about GOP candidate Donald Trump who is not an established politician but a business man and television personality. Also, @CNN mentioned the most Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders, who is seen as the "underdog" of the Democratic Party for being anti-establishment and

anti-Wall Street. With the completion of this study, the possibility of transferring issue salience from the mass media Twitter agenda to the public agenda and even the possibility to predict election results based on aggregates of mentions seems highly unlikely. However, the functions of agenda setting in the mass media during presidential elections in the social media context remain fascinating and worthy of study. After all, Lippmann (1922) argued that the mass media constructs the people's realities who are left unable to think for themselves. All that has changed is that nowadays people's realities seem to be attached to the screen of a smartphone.

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Appendix

Graduate Thesis Copyright Permission.

Huertas Landero, Joy Jeanine (College of General Studies Instruct) <jjhuertaslandero@liberty.e

👍   ↩ Reply all | ⌄

5/11/2016

support@twitonomy.com ⌄

Sent Items

Greetings!

I am contacting you because I would like to ask permission to reproduce your analytics and graphic charts from February 23, 2016 to March 15, 2016 in my graduate Thesis. After defending my Thesis, my program requires me to submit it for publication in the Liberty University open-access institutional repository, the Digital Commons, and in the Proquest thesis and dissertation subscription research database.
If you allow this, I will provide a citation of your work as follows:

@CNN Users Most Mentioned. (2016). Retrieved March 16, 2016, from http://www.twitonomy.com/profile.php?sn=CNN

Thank you for your consideration in this matter!

Mrs. Joy Cruz
Coms 101 Graduate Student Assistant
College of General Studies

Sam Deschamps (Twitonomy)
May 12, 11:17

Hello Joy,

Thanks for using Twitonomy. Please feel free to post portions of the analytics reports and/or images to illustrate your thesis.
We only ask that you indeed mention somewhere in it that you used Twitonomy (with a link) as a source.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance.

Have a nice day,

Best regards,

Sam Deschamps
Twitonomy team

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