

FEW-TO-MANY COMMUNICATION: PUBLIC FIGURES' SELF-PROMOTION ON TWITTER THROUGH "JOINT PERFORMANCES" IN SMALL NETWORKED CONSTELLATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine how members of a Twitter elite act together on a raised platform, thus performing "before" their manifold followers/audiences. A discourse study of Swedish public figures' Twitter activities resulted in the identification of three discourse types: expert sessions, professional "backstage" chatting, and exclusive livestreaming. Altogether, they demonstrate how nationally recognized politicians, journalists, and PR consultants socialize on Twitter in a top-down manner that works against broader participation. This "elite collaborative" tweeting can be conceptualized as a particular mode of mass communication, namely few-to-many.

Keywords: Twitter, politicians, journalists, PR consultants, mass communication, audiences, few-to-many communication, elite, performance, digital citizenship

COMUNICAZIONE "DA POCHI A MOLTI": AUTOPROMOZIONE DELLE PERSONE PUBBLICHE SU TWITTER ATTRAVERSO "L'AZIONE COMUNE" NELLE PICCOLE COSTELLAZIONI COLLEGATE

SINTESI

*Lo scopo dello studio è quello di analizzare come i membri dell'élite di Twitter operano insieme sulla piattaforma "elevata", dove si esibiscono "davanti" a un'ampia varietà di followers/pubblico. L'analisi qualitativa discorsiva delle attività dei personaggi pubblici svedesi su Twitter ha portato all'identificazione di tre tipi discorsivi: sessioni di esperti, conversazione professionale "dietro le quinte" e rivelazione esclusiva delle esperienze personali (ingl. *livestreaming*). Le tipologie menzionate mostrano come i politici, i giornalisti e i consulenti in pubbliche relazioni conosciuti a livello nazionale, socializzano dall'alto verso il basso, il che fa allontanare la partecipazione più ampia. Questa forma di "collaborazione dell'élite" può essere concettualizzata come un modo particolare della comunicazione di massa, ovvero come il modo "da pochi a molti" (ingl. *few-to-many*).*

Parole chiave: politici, giornalisti, consulenti in pubbliche relazioni, comunicazione di massa, il pubblico, comunicazione "few-to-many", élite, esibizione, cittadinanza digitale

INTRODUCTION¹

Founded in 2006, Twitter is used for sending short, text-based messages of no more than 140 characters (tweets). With more than 500 million users worldwide, it has become a central social networking service (SNS) for professionals, not least for people in the communication sector such as journalists, politicians, and PR consultants. To a greater extent than Facebook, for example, Twitter is an open network that allows users to make connections with (i.e. follow) whomever they want (Henderson, 2009, 44). On Twitter, non-elite users might not only follow the tweets of the elite, but also potentially chat with them. This has given Twitter democratic connotations, through its presumed ability to serve as a networked public sphere (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; cf. Habermas, 1962/1991) for the sake of many-to-many communication and the practicing of *digital citizenship* (Mossberger, 2009). The latter might be understood strictly from a political communication perspective centered on political deliberation (Dahlgren, 2005) and the two-way dialogue between politicians and citizens online. But it could also be interpreted as referring to citizens' "ability to participate in society online" (Mossberger, 2009, 173) in a more general sense, and as involving their everyday interactions with elites representing all kinds of professional fields such as politics, media, PR, research, business, or the cultural sector. This latter interpretation is the one I use here.

Internet scholars such as Jenkins (2008) suggest that Twitter and other SNSs are paving the way for a participatory culture (Delwiche, Jacobs Henderson, 2013) that is potentially more democratic and pluralistic than traditional mass society. Old power relations do not disappear easily (Castells, 2007, 2009), but communication in society does tend to become less asymmetrical. For example it is assumed that, in their use of Twitter, elites and their institutions can no longer simply "inform" target groups, "represent" them, or treat them as anonymous masses, but instead need to actively engage with digital citizens in an ongoing dialogue guided by values of sharing and collaboration (Cardoso, 2012) rather than manipulation.

According to critical research, however, Twitter's positive democratic image has gradually faded away and been replaced by more pessimistic views, pointing to the expansion of an elite culture (Fuchs, 2013; Marwick, 2013). Thus, Twitter is increasingly associated with quasi-interactive (Thompson, 1995) *top-down relations* between powerful Twitter users (popular artists, politicians, journalists, social media experts, etc.) and their "mass audiences"/followers (Marwick, 2013). The average Twitter user is often described as an *active* producer of tweets; but many, if not most, primarily act as recipients of content (Crawford, 2009) produced by a small Twitter

elite. Twitter audiences are decentered and thus hard to control (Muntean, Petersen, 2009), as well as networked (Marwick, 2013) and personal (Schmidt, 2014), but due to the Twitter elites' ability to achieve efficient "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009, 55; Lüders, 2008), audiences are also good *listeners* (Crawford, 2009), resembling the passive consumers of traditional media.

Despite the awareness of the hierarchal nature of Twitter, there is need for deep and detailed analyses of how elite power and elite visibility (Thompson, 2000) is a potential barrier to the practicing of digital citizenship. Not least, it is necessary to pay attention to how users with high status "collaborate" in their efforts to "win the audience" (Castells, 2007, 241) rather than engaging in a dialogue with non-elite users. Thus, the purpose of the study is to explore how members of a Twitter elite perform together "before" their manifold followers/audiences. More precisely, the aim is to analyze self-promotion on Twitter as a case of elite oriented "joint performances" (cf. Goffman, 1959) that discourage broader participation. The empirical material includes Twitter interaction within a particular national context (Swedish users and tweets) during six days in 2014, centered on the activities of six nationally recognized public figures within politics, journalism, and the PR sector.

In addition to the notions about digital citizenship described above, the study is influenced by critical theory about the commercialization of media culture (Kellner, 1995) and its shaping of market-driven self-presentations and performativity (Thompson, 2000; Fairclough, 1995) in everyday use of social media (Marwick, 2013; Fuchs, 2013). The selected method, critical discourse studies, is primarily inspired by Fairclough's (1995, 2009) approach to intertextual analysis, which is relevant for capturing how the elite oriented "joint performances" creatively combine different genres, discourses, and styles.

The article is structured as follows. A description of previous research and theoretical background is followed by the materials, method, and empirical study that together demonstrate the three discursive types of "joint performances" found among the public figures and the ways in which they discourage broader participation. In the concluding section, it is suggested that the results can be conceptualized as a particular mode of mass communication, namely *few-to-many*.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THE FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is meant to complement existing critical research about hierarchical communication on SNSs; especially analyses that explore how *Twitter elites*, be they micro-celebrities, celebrities, or public figures in a broader sense,² seek to control or attract their followers/

1 This study has been funded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet).

2 Consequently, public figures are not necessarily classified as celebrities or considered part of celebrity culture.

audiences. Important previous studies are Page's (2012) analysis of the relation between micro-celebrities and their fan base; Marwick's (2013) examination of individual leaders and their followers, and Muntean and Petersen's (2009) exploration of individual celebrities' pseudo-intimate communication with their fans. The emphasis is on famous musicians, actors, or social media experts, but there are studies of journalists or politicians' strategic use of Twitter as well (for example, Hedman, 2016; Grant et al., 2010; Jackson, Lilleker, 2011). It is difficult, however, to find contributions that apply a cross-professional approach including, as in this study, politicians, journalists, and PR consultants. Furthermore, the focus so far has generally been on the relation between the successful *individual* user and his/her audiences, in accordance with a *one-to-many* rationale. Hence, apart from a small example from Marwick and boyd (2011b, 151–153), one rarely finds research that concentrates on the *social relations between elite users* high up in the social media pyramid. More specifically, what is of main interest in this context is how public figures' self-promotional tweeting is embedded in elite networked performances, i.e. in more or less spontaneous "collaborations" between users belonging to the same "VIP sphere."

Self-promotional performance as balancing the professional with the personal

This study includes elite users who more or less daily "construct images of themselves" (Marwick, 2013, 191; Marshall, 2010), and seek to perform an ideal self (Goffman, 1959) "before" their followers/audiences. More precisely, this involves

- performances of professional skills, authority, and experience, combined with;
- performances demonstrating a more relaxed, informal, and private/personal side of oneself.

The activities tend to be influenced by personal branding discourse (Marwick, 2013) as well as the language and editing traditions of "old" media, i.e. television, print press, and radio (Page, 2012, 182; Papacharissi, 2011, 310). For example, in longer interviews and broadcast talk shows, the interviewing journalist/host usually seeks to capture both professional and private/personal sides of the interviewee (Fairclough, 1995, 60; Tolson, 2006), while on SNSs such as Twitter, this journalistic method has become obligatory in the context of users' self-presentation and self-promotion. The language of traditional media could also be observed in the demand on users to generate tweets which tangent the basic news value criteria (cf. Galtung, Ruge, 1965). Thus, to be able to attract attention, one must deliver tweets that are "newsworthy" in terms of being very informative, unexpected, conflict oriented, amusing, and so forth.

Elite networking as "joint performances"

In this context, self-promotion is analyzed as comprising networked performances of the elite kind in which (a few) public figures appear in tandem "for public view." In line with Bourdieu's (1972/2003) theory about power and practice, users of Twitter seek to protect and expand their social capital, i.e. their personal network (Boase, 2008), by making "right" choices when tweeting, retweeting (forwarding others' tweets), favoring (i.e. expressing approval with a single mouse click), and not least interacting with others. In the latter case, the practice of *mentioning* is of central importance, i.e. the explicit addressing of users one wants to interact with, which is done by including their usernames in tweets. Twitter visibility, i.e. being seen and followed by as many people as possible, is a matter of being seen together with those who already are very visible (who have many followers) and/or have the right kind of status (a well-known politician, for example). Naturally, public figures interact with each other, though not only for strategic reasons. Two famous journalists might socialize online because they belong to similar professional circles and/or because they are old friends. But, when they are visible *together*, the exposure of their personal brands becomes greater, creating a win-win for both parties (cf. Sola, 2014). This potentially brings extra "news value" to the exchange and boosts attention among the "quiet audiences" (Crawford, 2009), that is, all those on Twitter who seldom if ever are invited to participate in the elite networks' interaction as active digital citizens, but instead passively consume it for various reasons, be it for the expert knowledge delivered or the intimate and gossip-like character of the tweets (cf. Marwick & boyd, 2011b).

Research questions

The primary research focus is on the following: what different types of public figures' "joint performances" can be identified in this context, and more precisely what does the interaction look like, discursively speaking? Secondly, in what ways does the interaction discourage broader participation? Thirdly, how can this elite and "collaborative" way of achieving mass communication be conceptualized? The well-established concept of one-to-many communication, is restricted to individual performance, so how should the intended "joint performances" be defined, theoretically speaking?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study sample comprises six public figures who have been selected because they are nationally recognized for their professional skills and enjoy an elite position both on and outside Twitter. The second cri-

Table 1: The selected public figures

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| Staffan Dopping (SD) @staffandopping: PR consultant (391 items) 18–20 Feb 2014 Ulf Kristofferson (UK) @U-Kristofferson: journalist at Swedish TV4 (239) 18–20 Feb 2014 Catharina Elmsäter-Svärd (CES) @elmsatersvard: Member of the Conservative Party and at the time Minister of Infrastructure in the Swedish center-right government (142) 18–20 Feb 2014 |
| Paul Ronge (PR) @paulronge: PR consultant (177) 29 Sep–2 Oct 2014 Jonna Sima (JS) @jonnasima: Cultural journalist/chief editor at the newspaper Arbetet (266) 29 Sep–2 Oct 2014 Fredrik Federley (FF) @federley: Member of the Centre Party and the European parliament (474) 29 Sep–2 Oct 2014 |

terion was having a large number of followers.³ In this respect, the number of followers varies between approximately 10,000 and 45,000, which are relatively high figures in a Swedish context. A third criterion was being highly active on Twitter. Because the intention was to cover a broader elite culture, the selected public figures represent different professional fields (politics, journalism, PR).

The empirical material was collected in two stages. To begin with, all tweets and retweets (referred to as items) among three public figures were collected during three “normal” days (18–20 Feb 2014), with the absence of exceptional events. In order to strengthen the study from an empirical point of view, additional material, with three new public figures, was collected during a second period. Again, I selected three “normal” days (29 Sep–2 Oct 2014). In the February material, the selected public figures all belong to similar elite networks on Twitter, which means that they frequently exchange tweets.

As the focus is on synchronous chatting, discussion, debate, etc., tweets have been analytically prioritized, while retweets only serve as potential background material. Furthermore, the six elite users/public figures should be viewed as nodes around which a network of interaction has been analyzed, which includes other users as well. In this context, I consequently focus on the six selected public figures' exchange of tweets with other public figures, but also on non-elite users who might seek to join the interaction.⁴ As all Twitter material is public and accessible to anyone, the six public figures as well as other users appear with their real names/usernames in the analyses. In doing so, I am following the ethical principles for Twitter research used by Marwick & boyd (2011b, 143).

The presented results should be viewed as the result of a scientific abstraction, that is, as “the outcome of a thought operation whereby a certain aspect of a

concrete object is isolated” (Danermark et al., 2002, 205). In other words, even if elite-oriented “joint performance” is an important aspect of the selected public figures' everyday use of Twitter, this study does not capture the entirety of their involvement. However, as this is a qualitative analysis, the intention is not to achieve a systematic examination of *all* different things that the public figures possibly do on Twitter.

Public figures and their mutual interactions often becomes very visible and popular on Twitter but the presence of a mass audience is never guaranteed. Not least, this has to do with the fact that “joint performances” can be more or less conspicuous. For example, in order to take part in an entire conversation thread, one needs to click on a tweet that belongs to the thread, as only this will show all replies. From an audience perspective, this might lead to many relevant situations where public figures chat or exchange professional ideas being overlooked. What also might negatively affect the exposure is the overall “messy” character of information in the Twitter flow, with many parallel activities that tend to increase the more accounts one follows. For example, “joint performances” might be mixed with, and thus be obscured by, a large number of retweets, but also by what Hogan (2010) calls exhibition material, i.e. tweets that are not conversational but which rather exhibit web links, photos, or other kinds of information (Hogan, 2010, 381).

The discourse study approach

Fairclough's (1995) sociolinguistic discourse approach is relevant for media texts in general, including conversational texts.⁵ To begin with, it is necessary to focus on the discourse practice, that is, how the self-performing practices of the public figures are a result of the dialectic relation between “the processes of text production and text consumption” (Fairclough, 1995, 58). For example, it is possible to assume that the producers' (the

3 However, public fame is not necessarily a prerequisite for achieving many followers, and some public figures do not have exceptionally many followers due to low activity.

4 Here, I include both additional public figures and “semi-public figures.” The latter are also public figures, but with limited reputation and power compared with the first category. Furthermore, a non-elite user is a user who is non-elite in relation to the public figures that occur in this study (again, in terms of reputation and power).

5 This approach differs from CA oriented research, as represented by Scannell (1991), Tolson (2006, 2010) and others, which contributes even more detailed analyses of mediated conversations, such as broadcast talk at the micro-level of the text.

public figures'/elite users') "joint performances" are adjusted to the imagined demands of the "text consumers," i.e. the followers/audiences (cf. Litt, 2012; Goffman, 1959). Public figures on Twitter may feel pressured to continually deliver texts (tweets) that are professionally relevant, witty, smart, or funny, as they take for granted that this is exactly what their followers/audiences expect of them. Another aspect of the discourse practice, central to this study, involves how the elite users/public figures occupy a raised platform "before" their (non-elite) followers/audiences and how this serves to discourage broader participation. Here, one should pay analytical attention to *what* is discussed and *how* it is discussed, and to the ways in which users, implicitly or explicitly, are or are not invited to participate through the presence or absence of replies and mentions (see above).

Thus, the discourse practice, in turn, needs to be linked with and analyzed at the textual level: the very language use deriving from the public figures' tweeting. What is of importance here is Fairclough's (1995) idea about conversationalism (Fairclough, 1995, 9–14), i.e. that the sociocultural process of marketization in society and the commercialization of media language and performances give rise to particular *discourse types* which involve the strategic and creative use, and/or intertextual combining of different genres, discourses, and styles simultaneously (Fairclough, 1995, 76–79):

- *genres*: "...semiotic ways of acting and interacting" (Fairclough, 2009, 164), which might derive from social media culture itself, such as the Twitter rule of writing messages in 140 characters or less (Lomborg, 2014), but primarily from broader language and media culture, such as chatting, debating, small-talk, storytelling, infotainment, etc.
- *discourses*: language use in given forms of social practice and knowledge production, for example: professional, lay, public, private/personal, economic, political, commercial, popular, educative, etc. discourses.
- *styles* "...identities or 'ways of being', in their semiotic aspect" (Fairclough, 2009, 164), involving more detailed accounts of how various genres and discourses are handled or become "realized," for example, in terms of a humorous, formal, informal, ironic, etc. style. Thus, a chat about professional matters might include a humorous style of explaining things, and so forth.

The added value of working with several analytical instruments (genre, discourse, style), instead of, for example, only genre (cf. Lüders et al., 2010), is the possibility it affords of chiseling out a more complex understanding of the intertextual character of the "joint performances," which are not reducible to discourses, genres, or styles. In some methodological contexts, discourses and genres are understood as fully compatible, but they are not always so (cf. Fairclough, 1995, 76). For example, not all relevant discourses that I have found in

the material are reducible to concrete genres, and therefore, these two concepts ought to be kept separate.

When it comes to the three identified discourse types (expert sessions, professional "backstage" chatting, and exclusive livestreaming), as a consequence of the effort to present the clearest and most interesting examples of "joint performances," some of the selected public figures appear rather often in the analyses (such as politician CES and journalist JS), while others appear much less frequently (politician FF) or even not at all (PR consultant PR). The greater presence or absence of different public figures in the results also has to do with that fact that some of them engage in elite-oriented interactions more often than others.

PUBLIC FIGURES ON TWITTER AND THEIR "JOINT PERFORMANCES": THREE DISCOURSE TYPES

Expert sessions

Something that makes it easier for the public figures to stand out extra much in the Twitter flow is for them to do professional performances together. Such *expert sessions* are primarily based on a combination of the genres of debating and "intellectual talk," which together with the professional discourse lead to a formal style of tweeting. But the activities still have an air of informality about them, through the occasional use of everyday language and a humorous style of exchanging ideas. For example, the empirical material includes politician FF's lengthy exchange of tweets with @frisund, a business reporter at one of Sweden's largest newspapers (SvD), about the Centre Party's attitude to nuclear power. Another example is JS's debate with, among others, the news press journalists @danielswedid and @oisincantwell about the presence of the term "King of Negroes" in Astrid Lindgren's children's stories about *Pippi Longstocking* from the 1940s, and whether or not it should be censored today.

The below interaction (Table 2) could be described as a good-humored showdown between well-known public figures from four competing Swedish media companies: TV4, Swedish Radio, the news agency TT, and the tabloid Aftonbladet. The debate/discussion revolves around the news of EU's decision to impose sanctions on the Ukraine and journalist UK's observation that, in their reporting, TT only cites EU sources and not Swedish foreign minister, Carl Bildt, who commented on the news at an early stage on Twitter. Thus, the disagreement presented below primarily concerns whether or not TT should consider Bildt's tweet a reliable source.

This Twitter debate/discussion thus includes several heavyweights in Swedish journalism, speaking from inside the news media sector. Their formal style is occasionally interrupted by internal humor ("Give it to 'em...") in a way that indicates friendly ties (Boase, 2008). For outsiders, all this together might reinforce the

Table 2: Expert session I

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| <p>Central extracts from the debate/discussion thread:</p> <p>I notice that @carlbildt beat TT's newflash about EU sanctions against the Ukraine by ten minutes</p> <p>@U-Kristofferson @carlbildt And I was before both of them :)</p> <p>@U-Kristofferson Well, if he [Bildt] didn't know it before TT then <i>that</i> would be news</p> <p>@lasseml Still, you cite EU sources. When @carlbildt has already tweeted about the decision and its consequences.</p> <p>@NDawod @carlbildt Now I see it. Well done!</p> <p>@Ulf-Kristofferson @carlbildt Thanks!</p> <p>@U-Kristofferson @lasseml @carlbildt That's great, Ulf! Give it to 'em, they [TT] can take it! :-)</p> <p>@staffandopping @U-Kristofferson @lasseml @carlbildt At the politics desk, we wouldn't consider a tweet from a minister a reliable source.</p> <p>@TomasRamberg @staffandopping @lasseml @carlbildt Well, if a minister leaked a decision from a government meeting, I would surely cite it.</p> <p>@staffandopping @Ulf-Kristofferson @lasseml @carlbildt Cite it, sure, but not consider it the truth.</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Opening tweet from TV4 journalist, UK (@U-Kristofferson).</p> <p>Input from another journalist, @NDawod at Sweden's largest tabloid, Aftonbladet, who in a humorous style (smiley) announces that she was first with the news. Here, we find an attempt to invite Carl Bildt into the discussion by the mentioning of @carlbildt.</p> <p>Comment to UK from @lasseml, reporter at TT, defending TT's decision not to cite Bildt.</p> <p>Reply from UK to the TT reporter, which is followed by a further exchange of tweets in which the latter confirms that TT simply missed Bildt's tweet.</p> <p>UK replies to @NDawod but does not include her in the general discussion (as visible below).</p> <p>@NDawod responds to UK</p> <p>Friendly and humorous interjection from PR consultant SD (@staffandopping), a former colleague of UK at Swedish TV4, which interrupts the serious and formal style of discussion between UK and @lasseml.</p> <p>Return to formal style with a comment from @TomasRamberg, renowned domestic politics reporter at Swedish Radio, who defends TT's decision. Like SD, he is immediately included in the conversation (see next tweet), as is not the case with @NDawood.</p> <p>UK challenges @TomasRamberg on the matter.</p> <p>Argumentative reply from @TomasRamberg to UK</p> |
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sense of a sutured elite cocoon whose activities are designed to be passively "listened to." One of the participants, @NDawod, is not included in the conversation thread, perhaps because she is the least experienced and least famous journalist in the group. In order to make the elite discourse extra conspicuous and "news-worthy" for followers/audiences, there are repeated but failed attempts to engage Carl Bildt himself, who is a political celebrity and global Twitter authority with more than 400,000 followers.

The empirical material primarily reveals expert sessions that are discursively "strict," i.e. which do not offend, puzzle, shock, or surprise followers/audiences. By maintaining communicative self-control (cf. Goffman, 1959, 217), a public figure avoids putting his/her professional authority, status, and career at risk (Gilpin, 2011, 234). However, by remaining in the safety zone, he/she runs the risk of seeming dull and uninteresting. Attempts to avoid the latter might explain the occurrence of jointly performed discursive Twitter spectacles, which, due

Table 3: Expert session II

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| <p>Central extracts from the conversation thread:</p> <p>I also love that Liv Strömquist reclaims the word “vulva” and skips the silly “<i>snippa</i>,” which only sounds childish and unappealing.</p> <p>@jonnasima But at the book fair, she mentioned it being a useful word for children, and that’s the purpose of it. Does anyone use it for grownups?</p> <p>@syrran @jonnasima You use it when talking with children (to explain that babies come out of the <i>snippa</i>, for example).</p> <p>@isobelverkstad @syrran Every word has its place. <i>Snippa</i> for children, vulva as a description of the genitalia as a whole, <i>fitta</i> for sex – and politics.</p> <p>@jonnasima @syrran But the vulva isn’t the entire genitalia? The vulva is the outer part, the vagina the inner.</p> <p>@isobelverkstad Yes, I mean the outer parts. The parts that have been overlooked throughout history @syrran</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Tweet from JS (@jonnasima), referring to an acclaimed book by award-winning feminist author, Liv Strömquist.</p> <p>Reply from @syrran, cultural editor and editor in chief at the newspaper UNT.</p> <p>Interjection from @isobelverkstad, liberal political leader writer at Expressen, Sweden’s second tabloid.</p> <p>Reply from JS, which includes educative discourse and an ambition to sort out the terminology.</p> <p>Correction from @isobelverkstad, who takes the “genitalia issue” further by focusing on their particular parts.</p> <p>Reply from JS who underlines the feminist political dimension of the thread (“overlooked throughout history”).</p> |
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to their eye-catching content, are able to tickle the interest of many more readers than usual. In the above example (Table 3), JS and some other nationally renowned female journalists discuss what to call female genitalia, a topic that is likely to stand out in the Twitter flow.

Compared the earlier exchange about TT/Carl Bildt, this is startling due to its over-the-top content, and thus “sells” the interaction, despite being embedded in serious gender-political discourse. The thread as a whole includes contributions from several non-elite users, but the above sequence is the natural center of the entire conversation due to its concentration of well-known media profiles in Sweden. The intellectual and initiated style of debating/discussing gender politics and the educative discourse establish a performance “from above” delivering enlightened information to the followers/audiences “below.”

Professional “backstage” chatting

Here, the overarching genre is chatting, which mainly comprises professional discourse, informal and backstage-like forms of exchange, and humor. An important aspect of this is to convey an authentic (Marwick, 2013; Marwick, boyd, 2011a) impression of oneself as a public figure and professional in company with equals. In the first example (Table 4), the Minister of Infrastructure (CES) and TV4 journalist UK lead a light-hearted chat about faulty computers at the government office. In the

usual “front stage” context, the two maintain a professional distance to each other, as the latter (journalist UK) is critically covering the former (politician CES). Therefore, their display of an unholy friendship on Twitter is likely to attract the attention of followers/audiences.

The door appears to be shut for some less influential users who want in (@LinusEOhlonson and @Rockmamma) (cf. @NDawod in Table 2). Like many other public figures on Twitter, CES and UK *do* exchange tweets with broader groups of users as well, but in this particular context, they have the leading roles in a humorous “show” performance that takes place on a raised Twitter podium with space only for a few.

This discourse type might also involve a chatting style that drifts into some *very internal* humor. This is the case in the below exchange (Table 5) between cultural journalist JS and @juanitafranden, sports journalist at TV4, known among other things for her coverage of Italian and Spanish football, and Swedish football star, Zlatan Ibrahimović.

The exchange of tweets concerns things having to do with their journalistic profession (click journalism, sentence lengths, body text, a visit to a book fair) making it difficult for others to follow the humorous points, not to mention to join in themselves. From the outside, this might seem like a private conversation about a professional matter between two people with no concern about the potential presence of thousands of followers/audience-members. But at the same time it could serve

Table 4: Professional “backstage” chatting I

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| <p>Central extracts from the conversation thread:</p> <p>The annoying “shitmail-system” we have at the government offices now... it’s useless! I shouldn’t say this, but it’s driving me crazy! Is it a coup?</p> <p>@elsatersvard Coup?</p> <p>@U-Kristofferson I hereby report a crack in the Alliance [the governing coalition]. The problem is not the e-mail system, but the computers, and that we’re forced to use Explorer @elmsatersvard</p> <p>@U-Kristofferson @elmsatersvard Ha ha. Now we shouldn’t believe such things. Or, is it perhaps S [the opposition party] which is trying something?</p> <p>@U-Kristofferson @elmsatersvard mobil. computerswedenidg.se/computersweden...</p> <p>@JohanIngero @U-Kristofferson Absolutely, that could explain it. Explorer! I knew it!</p> <p>@elmsatersvard @JohanIngero Is this a problem for the entire government? How serious is it?</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Opening tweet by CES (@elmsatersvard): a professionally oriented tweet (about working at the government offices) is combined with humor (“shitmail-system”; “It’s driving me crazy!”, “Is it a coup?”).</p> <p>UK’s response. This becomes the starting point for an internal chat of the humorous and relaxed kind between CES, UK, and @JohanIngero, Press Officer for another Minister.</p> <p>Opening tweet from @JohanIngero which includes both a humorous interjection (“I hereby report a crack...”) and a formal/serious comment, identifying the web browser Explorer as the likely source of CES’s technical problems.</p> <p>Two users – @LinusEOhlon and @Rockmamma seek to enter the discussion. The former playfully continuing the humorous style, and the latter contributing a link that might be useful for solving the computer problem. As is evident below, they never become included in the chat, which thus continues without any mention of their usernames.</p> <p>Partly ironic, partly serious reply from CES.</p> <p>UK pretends that this is breaking news, thereby generating “infotainment” about journalism’s coverage of politics.</p> |
|--|---|

Table 5: Professional “backstage” chatting II

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>The chat:</p> <p>I give you: the world’s longest first sentence in body text that click journalism has ever seen: aftonbladet.se/sportbladet/fo...</p> <p>@juanitafranden Staccato is sooo early 00s after all.</p> <p>@jonnasima Yep. Even the uncommon spelling “Champions Leauge” is typical 2014.</p> <p>@juanitafranden Ha-ha, or rather a post book-fair spelling</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Opening tweet from @juanitafranden about a very long first sentence, appearing in an article published in her own newspaper, Aftonbladet.</p> <p>Ironic response from JS (@jonnasima), which uses professional jargon, mentioning a particular style of journalistic writing, i.e. staccato style.</p> <p>Continuation of internal joking from @juanitafranden about a typo.</p> <p>...which is concluded by an “out of context” comment from JS, referring to a recent visit to a book fair.</p> |
|--|---|

as strategic communication in which insider status is being jointly performed. More precisely, the cryptic style with its signaling of a shared world that is not accessible to just anyone makes them and their professional position seem extra remarkable and desirable.

Exclusive lifestreaming

The third discourse type involves further emphasis by public figures on private/personal discourse. The below examples are embedded in the genre of chatting, and are characterized by humorous and/or informal language use. Professional discourse may be there as well, but mostly in the margins, serving as an implicit context that gives extra meaning to the interaction: "Look, these serious and well-known professionals are tweeting about very unprofessional matters!" The concept of "lifestreaming" refers to the practice of continually exposing selected parts of one's private everyday life on SNSs (Marwick, 2013, 208), and it is "exclusive" in that it is primarily performed within elite networks. In the below example (Table 6), JS announces that she is sick, which immediately generates comforting comments from several people, including from the Swedish music manager @HansiF:

Not least, what makes the sharing of memories from last year's Almedalen (#rememberalmedalen) interesting for followers/audiences – and a "commodity" for media consumption – is the exclusion of detailed information, possibly generating speculations about the cast and the crutches. More precisely, what happened in Almedalen?

Below (Table 7), the Swedish Minister of Infrastructure (CES) tweets about her addiction to tobacco and her attempts to quit using snus (a finely-ground moist tobacco product that is placed under the upper lip) which is banned in the EU with the exception of Sweden and the other Nordic countries:

Well, it's like this... I'm in my third week without snus... Check!

Here, a "dialogue" with non-elite users about addiction to snus would probably create goodwill among certain voter groups and increase her popularity. But, as the Minister's tweet does not clearly invite "just anyone" on Twitter to share his/her experiences, this never happens. Instead, CES has formulated her tweet in a way that resembles a personal Facebook status update, i.e. a message addressed to a relatively well-defined group of "friends." As a consequence, the snus tweet is predominantly commented on by people in her personal (elite) network, consisting of other Swedish public figures from politics, media, and the infrastructure sector. Together, they "jointly perform" a rambunctious chat about the Minister's achievement (Table 7 demonstrates a selection of tweets).

A Minister's tweeting about her addiction to tobacco is the sort of soft news-like information that might end up on the gossip pages of commercial media. The more it is commented on by other public figures, the greater its news value, especially if friendly comments come from unexpected sources, such as one of her antagonists in the Swedish parliament, Leftist politician Lars Ohly, or a journalist (UK) who usually performs critical interviews with CES on television. Concerning the politician-journalist "friendship," CES responds to UK's first tweet, "So that's why you lost it over your e-mail [problems] yesterday?" in the following humorous way: "@U-Kristofferson It may have played a small part in it :-)" While the relation between CES and UK seems rather equal, @skogstransport and @petteressen are less well-known public figures who instead appear like members of CES's political entourage tasked with behaving sympathetically ("Wow. Impressive!! Keep it up!!"; "Wonderful... stay motivated!"), but who also to take the opportunity to bask in the glory of the Minister.

Table 6: Exclusive Lifestreaming I

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>The chat:</p> <p>Sore throat, fever, and weak. The book fair finally took its toll :(</p> <p>@jonnasima At least you came home without a cast and crutches #rememberalmedalen</p> <p>@HansiF Haha! Yes, but it's always something.</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>JS (@jonnasima) is referring to Sweden's largest book fair, in Gothenburg. Combination of professional discourse (visiting the book fair and working there), and a personal statement: "it took its toll :("</p> <p>With an internal hashtag (#rememberalmedalen), @HansiF humorously refers to a past event when things went much worse (cast and crutches). Almedalen is an annual political convention on the island of Gotland, Sweden.</p> <p>JS confirms that she gets the joke and that she remembers last year's "incident" at Almedalen.</p> |
|---|---|

Table 7: Exclusive livestreaming II

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Political colleagues:</p> <p>Well done!</p> <p>Well done! Good luck!</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Congratulatory tweet from @OhlyLars (Member of Parliament and former leader of the Left Party)</p> <p>Congratulatory tweet from @brohedeTell (Member of Parliament, representing the Liberal Party)</p> |
| <p>"Colleague" in the media sector:</p> <p>So that's why you lost it over your e-mail [problems] yesterday? [see CES and UK's conversation in Table 4]</p> <p>As an inveterate user of snus, with three failed attempts to quit under my belt, I can sympathize somewhat. Politicians are humans too :-)</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Humorous and recontextual tweet from @U-Kristofferson (UK) (journalist at TV4)</p> <p>Another humorous tweet from @U-Kristofferson, alluding to the professional conflict between journalists and politicians ("Politicians are humans too :-)")</p> |
| <p>Colleagues in the infrastructure sector:</p> <p>Wow. Impressive!! Keep it up!!</p> <p>Wonderful! Now comes the hard part: When you forget why you quit, but remember how good it was. Stay motivated!</p> | <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Congratulatory tweet from @skogstransport (Transport Political spokesperson for Swedish Forest Industries Federation)</p> <p>Congratulatory and encouraging tweet from @petteressen (Business Manager of Swedish Railway Company)</p> |

FEW-TO-MANY COMMUNICATION AS BARRIER TO THE PRACTICING OF DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

The above presented analysis demonstrates how networked (Castells, 2007, 2009) public figures' "joint performances" discourage broader participation and thus work against the practicing of digital citizenship (Mossberger, 2009). The underlying assumption here is that the more Twitter turns into a space where public figures/elites primarily interact with each other, the more "ordinary users"/non-elites tend to become passive recipients of the former's messages, rather than being active participants themselves. By means of Fairclough's (1995, 2009) discourse studies approach, three different discourse types have been identified and examined, all of which, as a consequence of the marketization and commercialization of social relations on Twitter (Marwick, 2013), tend to constitute media-consuming followers/audiences (Crawford, 2009). In the case of expert sessions, the performing of professional insider skills indirectly excludes lay participation well as lay perspectives. If one is not part of this "dream team" of nationally recognized media practitioners, one is relegated to the sidelines, from where one is supposed to follow the intellectual exchange as if it were a televised event. Due to the presence of intel-

lectual argumentation and confrontation between different interests, at least to some extent, the expert sessions resemble an online public sphere (Ausserhofer, Maireder, 2013; cf. Habermas, 1962/1991). However, in the case of the other two discourse types, professional "backstage" chatting and exclusive livestreaming, and the public figures' sharing of glimpses from their daily lives, the impression of "gated communities" and "elite tribes" takes over. In terms of genres, discourse and styles, what comes to dominate the interaction is a relaxed way of conversing, with personal, internal, informal, and humorous comments. Again, if one is not part of this inner world and familiar with its jargon, there is no easy way to join the discussion, and all that remains to do is to be amused by the public figures' mutual conversations.

The mass communication dimension

As a suggestion, these three discourse types could be conceptualized as a particular mode of mass communication, namely *few-to-many communication*. Thus, the "few" are small constellations of users in particular situations whose networked activities can be understood in terms of "joint performances." As demonstrated above, it is a hierarchal kind of communication that primarily involves interaction between public figures who are

Table 8: The relations between few-to-few, few-to-many, and one-to-many communication on Twitter

| Few-to-few | Few-to-many | One-to-many |
|---|---|--|
| Interaction among a few users that (only) attracts the attention of few | Interaction among a few users that attracts the attention of many | A singular users' dissemination of information that attracts the attention of many |

elite users with some type of power and status which usually entails their gathering many followers, who become the audiences. The greater the concentration of public figures in an interactive situation, be it a professionally oriented debate or trivial chat, the more followers/audience-members that are potentially gathered "beneath" their Twitter podium, and the more hierarchical the few-to-many communication becomes.

To more deeply understand few-to-many situations, we should compare it with its closest relatives on Twitter: few-to-few and one-to-many.

On Twitter, synchronous interaction between a few users is very common. However, most of these cases should probably be conceptualized not as few-to-many, but as *few-to-few*, cases where, let us say, 3–4 users discuss a topic that attracts the attention of few outsiders, and thereby do not achieve mass communication. On Twitter, digital citizenship is likely to be primarily practiced in terms of few-to-few communication, in which non-elite users exchange tweets with other non-elite users, with no input from any elite users whatsoever. Thus, due to its relative concentration of non-elite users, few-to-few communication tends to be associated with a limited version of democratic participation (cf. Delwiche, Jacobs Henderson, 2013). Notably, the above examples of "joint performances" among the public figures do not automatically generate few-to-many communication, but for various reasons may result in few-to-few communication as well. For example, this happens if rather few users actually notice JS's expert-oriented gender political discussions with other intellectuals, or UK and CES's humorous chatting. But, in their case, a few-to-few situation is likely to be avoided because they are public figures with many Twitter followers/audiences.

Another relative of few-to-many is one-to-many. To begin with, one-to-many communication arises through being able to overcome the situation of one-to-few communication, tweeting that receives little attention. It is associated with single users, mostly celebrities and public figures, who have many followers, perhaps millions of them, and who therefore have the potential to reach a large mass of people. It is also possible to imagine a user who only has twenty followers but who still achieves one-to-many status by using a particular hashtag and/or being retweeted numerous times. More precisely, one-

to-many and few-to-many communication are related, as they both represent "successful" attempts to achieve mass communication, and because of their inherent suppression of equality-oriented interaction with non-elite users. Consequently, regardless of whether one operates alone (one-to-many) or in group (few-to-many), one's priority is to disseminate information "downward," through a personal branding discourse, and to inform, entertain, amuse, or excite others in order to attract a large audience. As barriers to broader participation and the practicing of digital citizenship, one-to-many and few-to-many thus appear as "partners in crime."

However, it is possible to claim that the growing use of Twitter as merely a means for strategic "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009, 55; Marwick, 2013) is not necessarily undermining the participatory power of non-elite users. This is because, on Twitter, not only the elite, but anyone can potentially reach out to "the masses" through one-to-many communication. Moreover, few-to-many constellations occasionally include non-elite users as well, who are invited to join the elite's conversations "before" large audiences. Despite the relevance of such remarks, this study's demonstration of discursive "elite concentration" raises critical questions about whether or not the normative *ideal* of a dialogue between elite users and non-elite users is at risk of gradually fading away. The generally accepted story about Twitter is still embedded in ideas about inclusive participation: this is the digital space which professionally acknowledged public figures seek out, not only in order to network with equals, but also to come in direct contact with their voters, readers, fans, users, and so forth. But, given that forms of interaction such as few-to-many communication are expanding on Twitter, this will soon be dismissed as utopian thinking. At least, this seems to be the prognosis for the Swedish Twitter environment. More research in both Sweden and other national contexts is however needed in order to determine whether Twitter is primarily promoting or counteracting the practice of digital citizenship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my colleague Ulrika Olausson for her valuable input, as well as Everett Thiele for suggesting the wording "few-to-many."

KOMUNIKACIJA OD PEŠČICE K MNOGIM: SAMOPROMOCIJA JAVNIH OSEBNOSTI NA TWITTERJU S SKUPNIM NASTOPANJEM V MALIH SPLETNIH KONSTELACIJAH

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POVZETEK

Twitter pogosto povezujemo z inkluzivnim, demokratičnim komuniciranjem in praksami digitalnega državljanstva, ki omogočajo "vsakemu, da klepeta z vsemi". Ob tem se raziskava osredotoča na razkorak med elitnimi in neelitnimi uporabniki, kjer so slednji pasivno občinstvo prvih. Kljub splošnemu zavedanju o hierarhičnem značaju različnih družbenih omrežij se pojavlja potreba po študijah, ki proučujejo njihove diskurzivne značilnosti. Namen je raziskati, kako člani Twitterjeve elite delujejo skupaj na "povzdignjeni" platformi, kjer nastopajo "pred" najrazličnejšimi sledilci/občinstvi. Kvalitativna diskurzivna analiza aktivnosti švedskih javnih osebnosti na Twitterju je pripeljala do identifikacije treh diskurzivnih tipov: sej ekspertov, profesionalnega klepetanja v "zaodrju" in ekskluzivnega razkrivanja osebnih doživetij (angl. *lifestreaming*). Navedeni tipi kažejo, kako se nacionalno prepoznavni politiki, novinarji in svetovalci za odnose z javnostmi socializirajo od zgoraj navzdol, kar odvrča širšo participacijo. Takšno obliko "sodelovanja elit" je mogoče konceptualizirati kot poseben način množičnega komuniciranja, in sicer kot način "od peščice k mnogim" (angl. *few-to-many*).

Ključne besede: politiki, novinarji, svetovalci za odnose z javnostmi, množično komuniciranje, občinstvo, "few-to-many" komuniciranje, elite, nastopanje, digitalno državljanstvo

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