

Live research: Twittering an election debate

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Abstract

This paper questions how vertical tickers on leading social media platforms (blogs, Facebook, and in particular the Twitter micro-blogging platform) pose new challenges to research that focuses on political communications campaigns. Vertical looped tickers highlight the fleeting nature of contemporary networked and socially mediated communications, since they provide an intensely compressed space (interface) and time to have posts viewed by friends and followers. This article draws upon a research collaboration with the news division of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to understand how Canadian political parties increasingly worked to strategically intervene, in real time on Twitter, during a broadcast political debate.

Keywords

Election debate, political communications, politics 2.0, social media, Twitter

The rapid growth of networked, handheld, virtual, embedded, and locative information and communication technologies raises important questions about methods of studying processes, objects, actors and technological platforms that are by design or dysfunction constantly in flux. Mediated life has so vastly multiplied its forms and sites of communication and storytelling that the ability to recall where one heard or viewed a news report, a rumor about a friend, or even the source of an urgent work-related request now requires a panoply of aggregate remediators – smartphones, RSS feed managers, personalized search engines, live social network feeds and so forth. In an age of meta-information such technologies serve to collapse and focus time – which is increasingly socially mediated time – to a window of approximately ten minutes. This occurs both in the past, through interfaces like Facebook or Twitter that bury ten-minute-old communications,

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and in the future through anticipatory buzzing and pinging reminders of duties to come in ten minutes' time. Visually, such *interface time* literally hypermediates a window in time – what can fit on the interface before being pushed off (or typically down) to make way for the next ten minutes.

Unlike Facebook, Myspace, Cyworld, Bebo and other social networking sites that offer a vast array of interfaces and functions for users and their networked friends, micro-blogging platforms like Twitter offer a decidedly trimmed-down interface focused on a vertical ticker of short (140 characters maximum) bursts of text. Such an interface maintains a concise focus on a very small window of time. Unlike horizontal stock or sports tickers that communicate incremental changes in prices and scores in a constant loop, Twitter's vertical ticker relies upon friends and contacts to actively repost or 'retweet' a post back to the top of its vertical-ticker interface. Unlike looped horizontal feeds and tickers, initial research has found that only 6 percent of all tweets are reposted back to the top of Twitter's vertical interface.¹ Duncan Geere (2010) summarizes this point nicely: '92 percent of ... retweets occur within the first hour. Multiplying those probabilities together means that fewer than one in 200 messages get retweeted after an hour's gone by. Essentially, once that hour's up, your message is ancient history.' Such findings thus question the means by which individuals or, as we shall see in this article, political campaigns might sustain and expand the readership of their posts across Twitter's social networks. Architecturally speaking, un-retweeted or reposted comments on Twitter resemble a hyperactive blog interface, in which newer posts simply push older ones down in short order off a user's PC, tablet or smartphone interface. Older posts are in effect buried into the interface depths of the infinite downward scroll or pushed off onto additional hyperlinked pages (i.e., the indefinite 'next page' click).

The 'live' form of research discussed in this article seeks to understand the techniques, technologies and user dynamics that attempt to expand this intensely time- and interface-compressed platform during a live broadcast political debate. The article argues that the emergence of vertical tickers and other forms of hyper-immediate, time-compressed social media interfaces highlight the need for real-time forms of Internet research. The article investigates how political forms of communication – particularly during heightened periods of partisan conflict such as elections, scandals and political/economic crises – are being expanded onto 'second screens' (typically PCs and smartphones running social media interfaces) that enable socially mediated and networked commentary and conversations on live broadcast events. This live form of research thus requires an understanding of the networked affordances and technological encodings (e.g., meta-tags) of discrete digital bursts or *objects* (Schneider and Foot, 2010), particularly tweets, blog posts, comments posted on online newspapers' web pages, images and videos from their specific platforms, or from larger aggregators such as personalized feed (RSS) managers, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) or search engines like Google. Such components of social networking sites consequently form the basis for software code-focused media research, the platform upon which researchers can attempt to determine the tactics, conventions, functions and dysfunctions of real-time political discourse on Twitter, or across mediated screens, platforms and interfaces (Rogers, 2006). Given the rapid development of social media platforms, conventions on these platforms, and the ever-changing sets of rules and regulations that govern sites like

Twitter (as manifested through their programming interface or API), this article's discussion of 'live research' seeks to account for the always already shifting dynamics in online communication flows. While some may impart a Latourian (Latour and Weibel 2005) motive at work here, particularly with regard to his 'object-oriented' philosophy (see Harman, 2009), this study extends well beyond the tweet-as-object to an appreciation of the temporalities of interfaces, information architectures and the political tactics deployed on social media platforms like Twitter. Thus, what is suggested here is a more hyper-immediate and immersed form of research, not one that merely 'tracks the object', as Lash (2007) argues, but rather a reflexive, empirical approach to understanding media flows in social media's increasingly compressed interface time.

A focus on in-the-moment communications and networking attempts to build upon broader discussions, theories and methods of understanding open-ended networked, non-hierarchical or distributed forms of communications (Fuller, 2003; Galloway, 2004), to one that attempts to understand the strategic (politically speaking) deployment of political campaigns and communications in terms of compressed and socially mediated interface time (Cunningham, 2008). The question of 'live research' in Internet studies, and consequently in ICT-enabled studies of political communications (Chadwick and Howard, 2009; Kluver et al., 2007) continues to develop an important methodological debate within the broader field of Internet studies. Andrew Chadwick's (2011) recent study of shifting political information cycles are of particular importance to this form of live research. In attempting to determine the new roles and opportunities that social media afford in the political process, Chadwick investigates the temporality and flow of political news, much like Norris (2000) before him, so as to better understand how social media actors intervene and disrupt political and mainstream media tempos and schedules in real time, in effect producing a new tempo of mediated political life, or a new 'political information cycle'.

Methods of real-time research, however, have a much longer history in Internet studies. Annette Markham's (1998) study of virtual chat rooms, for example, offered an auto-ethnographic approach to the study of computer-mediated communication, a distinctly participatory form of real-time or live research. Markham's study sought to enumerate the complex literacies involved in navigating a virtual chat room in the moment by logging the challenges she faced as they occurred in real time onscreen. Markham's study highlighted important conventions that occur in online environments, a process that was made all the more apparent by her recollections of being immersed in live interactions with other users and the software and interface itself. Christine Hine (2007) similarly suggested a 'connective ethnographic' approach to understanding how various forms of computer-mediated communication connected the user to their 'offline' life. It is this connective, networked approach that informs the present work. This article is an attempt to understand how political campaigns and communications seek to reconnect political communication (e.g. images, blog posts, excerpts from speeches) across social media interfaces, and in doing so we hope to redress the temporal limits of communication and subsequent limited attention span of new media audiences and social media interfaces. Recent examples of live or real-time research have also emphasized the act of always being ready to conduct research, of being in a position to capture a political crisis or a live-mediated event on the Net. Andreas Jungherr and Pascal Jurgens' study of Twitter in

Germany (2011), for instance, builds upon Allan's (2002) notion of 'topic detection', an attempt to continuously collect and analyze social media content feeds and flows of information for signs of increased activity. While the project presented here similarly developed a method of data collection and content analysis of tweets in advance of the televised election debate under study, this article seeks to understand the tactical forms of political communication deployed in real time on Twitter and other Web platforms during the debate broadcast.

Overall, the 'live research' paradigm discussed in this article places greater emphasis on the relationship between the rules and regulations of social media platforms as we move from a 'news cycle' paradigm to one defined by a new media-enabled 'political information cycle' (Chadwick, 2011). At the center of this shift in mediated temporalities is a set of tactics that seeks to sustain networked and fleeting/time-compressed communications across new and old media platforms (e.g. TV, the Web, social media, hand-held devices) and, of course, mediated political dialogue, debate and commentary (Gurevitch et al., 2009). Methodologically speaking, the question to be answered is: why is there a need to study and analyze such dynamics in real time? One answer relates to the contingencies of interface time as a space that requires various strategies for communication (political communication in this instance) to be re-posted (or 're-tweeted' on the Twitter platform, although similar dynamics can be found on many other vertical feed-like social media platforms), so as to recursively spread across social networks and push the limits of socially mediated interface time. In the context of political campaigns, crisis management public relations or environmental disasters, such efforts to expand interface time take on an even greater significance in the form of the emergent use of second screens and interfaces. The interactive appendage to the broadcast sphere of political life (e.g. 24-hour news channels and live political programming) becomes an increasingly important space to view immediate reactions to live events from a host of online political actors (e.g. media pundits, political bloggers, politicians and their staff). Such 'live' or near real-time reactions in the Twittersphere have consequently emerged as sites from which to support, ridicule and/or refute the statements and claims made by public figures on live television. In political terms, micro-blogging sites like Twitter have become key sites of 'rapid response' to live political events and other particularly time-sensitive news stories.²

The effort to develop a 'live research' paradigm in new media studies also attempts to take into consideration the speed of communications. Publishing one's political opinion online, for example on a blog, is no longer subject to editorial delay. User-generated content can be posted in real time at the click of a mouse. Does it not make sense then to build such limited media time (or interface time, in the case of the Twitter ticker) into research methods to understand the effects of such media platforms and networks? Social media are structured to visualize only near real-time contributions; as such, their temporalities, flows and interfaces set the context in which political communications and campaigns are enabled, deployed and represented through the introduction of real-time architectures (back-end code) and interfaces (e.g. feeds and tickers). The fleeting nature of not only networked communication but also the ever-changing software code, interfaces and APIs that facilitate such micro-blogging activity require a temporal rethinking of what it means to conduct research on contemporary political communications and campaigning.

Networked (or '2.0') communications and interactivity are over-determined by conventions of the present. Whether uploading, sharing, commenting, downloading, re-naming, importing, embedding or seeding, all such networked forms of communication and interactivity are enacted or published in the moment with little or no delay. Likewise, the very language of networked life, political or otherwise, amplifies the immediate while clearly ex-distancing the technological, political and economic underpinnings of such networks. It is this latter phenomenon that needs to be understood through the lens of the 'live'.

Twittering a debate

In order to better understand the link between social media's compressed interface time and second-screen interactivity in their aggregate role as re-mediator of live political discourse, the example of live research discussed here focuses on a collaboration between Ryerson's Infoscope Lab and the news division of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) during the 2008 federal election in Canada.³ This study focuses specifically on the development and execution of a near real-time analysis of political tweets posted during the CBC's live English-language broadcast of the federal leaders' debate on television,⁴ a key moment in Canada's national election. The Infoscope Lab's live approach to the election night study was designed to capture an early-adopter moment in ICT-enabled political communications⁵ – one that sought to determine the influence of Net-savvy political operatives, and also the degree to which the platform served as an interactive space for real-time commentary on a live broadcast event.⁶

Given the minority status of the governing Conservative Party in the Westminster-style Canadian House of Commons, a series of potential election-inducing showdowns had occurred over the previous 12 months. During this period, we developed a series of research methods and tools that tracked the growing importance and impact of the Canadian political blogosphere and published our findings. After receiving substantial media coverage of our research during the Ontario provincial election 2007,⁷ producers in the news division of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC News) invited the Infoscope Lab to extend our collaboration to the federal election. Dubbed 'Ormiston Online' (for the lead reporter on the project, Susan Ormiston), the CBC brought together staff from all their key news divisions (radio, new media, local, national and 24-hour TV) so as to better disseminate the news stories produced by the team for the CBC's myriad news-focused programs and platforms. Unbeknownst to the Infoscope Lab at the time, the CBC had designed the project as a dry run for their subsequent multi-platform news realignment. The Infoscope Lab was approached to assist in the development of a public Web portal, Internet campaigning research, on-air interviews, and other advice related to developing news stories during the campaign. While we anticipated some analysis would need to be conducted on a daily basis during the campaign, our methods of collecting data (for blog posts and YouTube videos of the main party leaders) had been established, tested and refined over many months prior to our collaboration with the CBC. On a routine basis (three times per week), our team produced a ranking and short qualitative analysis of the most cited (linked to) blog posts from a sample of all the self-defined partisan political bloggers in Canada,⁸ and a similar ranking of the week's most-viewed YouTube-hosted videos related to the federal party leaders during the campaign.⁹

Data was collected and analyzed each morning and formatted for publication on the CBC's website (cbc.ca). One or two paragraphs were written in accessible language to provide context for the findings, which typically involved providing analysis for why certain posts or videos were receiving such attention online.

Our research into the impact of blogging and YouTube videos on the election campaign process served as the backbone of our contribution to the CBC's coverage of the Internet-based aspects of the campaign. The first half of the official campaign period had witnessed a series of Internet-based scandals, missteps and other campaign-related shenanigans that our collaborative project helped shed light upon through our social media research and its subsequent dissemination through the CBC's website and broadcast platforms. Executives at the CBC were reportedly pleased with our work and subsequently pushed for more content analysis, research and coverage of Internet-bound, campaign-related goings-on.

The most challenging live research aspect of the CBC collaboration concerns the use of the micro-blogging platform Twitter during the campaign's nationally televised leaders' debate. Days before the debate, we met with the producers of the Ormiston Online project at the CBC's corporate offices to discuss how we might cover the forthcoming televised event. Our discussions focused on converging the broadcast and social media screens so as to highlight the real-time discussions and debates initiated on Twitter that we believed would be responding to the comments, barbs, guffaws and poignant zingers served up by the party leaders during the televised debate.

Collecting the tweets

Unlike our research on Canadian partisan blogs (Elmer et al., 2009) that restricted its sample to opt-in, self-described partisan members of one of Canada's political party-branded blogrolls, the Twitter debate night project was a decidedly open-ended affair that called into question the means by which we would filter or otherwise collect micro-blogging posts. Recognizing the limits of Twitter's compressed interface time, and its real-time use as a form of audience debate and dialogue, our project not only sought to analyze the content but also the context – the time – it was posted. Axel Bruns' (2010) initial research on the use of Twitter during the 2010 Australian televised leaders' debate was similarly designed to compare trends with those attributed to a popular cooking show, implicitly questioning the social media activity of contrasting social interests. In this context, Bruns' use of hashtags (#) – the most common form of creating new feeds or thread-like vertical posts of tweets on similar topics – to filter and collect relevant posts for two simultaneously televised programs served as a helpful comparative approach to data collection. By contrast, partly due to the infancy of Twitter use in Canada at the time of our collaborative project, and in particular the conventions and practices associated with hashtagging content, no one hashtag could capture a representative sample of posts during the Canadian televised debate. In other words, the use of specific hashtags has emerged over time after much conversation, debate and adoption.

Unlike Bruns' study of the Australian debate night, our live research project also sought to merge two sets of data to pose both qualitative and quantitative questions.

We were not solely driven by the goal of determining the quantity of tweets during the debate broadcast, nor their numbers in context to other live events.¹⁰ Rather, the project sought to determine the interplay between broadcast comments by the leaders and reactions on Twitter. After determining whether or not there was a correlation between specific rhetorical flourishes, issues or lively exchanges among the party leaders during the debate and audience members' Twitter posts, we also sought to determine how such exchanges were deployed tactically to expand Twitter's limited interface time and the subsequent reach of fleeting posts.¹¹

We decided to cast a wide net to collect our micro-blogging posts related to the live broadcast debate. Forty-eight hours before the debate, the project staff – both academic and CBC-based – promoted the use of the #ormistondebate hashtag. Since both the project and the debate were being broadcast by the CBC, they were keen to cross-promote and otherwise brand their coverage. Overall, our research deployed a mixed hashtag, a Twitter account name, and formal party leader name search term 'basket' to cull as large a sample as possible.¹²

In addition to these meta-tag and formal name search terms, the project also made important use not only of the content of the tweets, but the time stamp or log that accompanied each post. Such time stamps afforded the ability to cross-reference Twitter posts with the time-stamped transcripts of the leaders' televised comments. While it took mere seconds to collect the tweets during the broadcast, our analysis was delayed by about ten minutes as we waited for the delivery of the transcripts from the CBC via email.

Debate night proved to be incredibly hectic as we collected the data, and subsequently produced charts (see Figure 1) that depicted the minute-by-minute activity in the Twittersphere (the chart was broadcast later that evening on CBC). While preparing such charts for broadcast our research team also referred to the transcript of the debate to correlate jumps in Twitter posts to specific moments in the televised debate. While we did

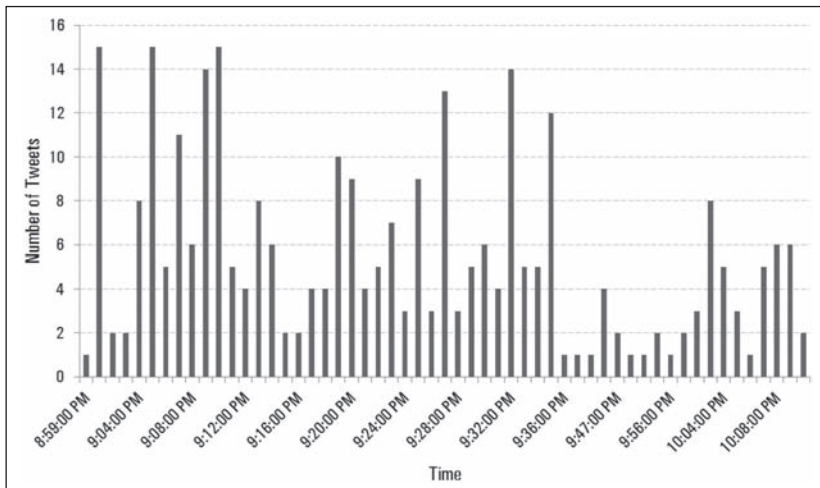


Figure 1. Twittering the debate.

not have enough time or space to include representative tweets on the charts to demonstrate these findings, we provided these tweets to our head reporter who used them on the live broadcast to qualify the spikes in Twitter activity shown on our chart. The most active moment over the first hour of the debate on Twitter, for example, occurred at 9:32 p.m., immediately after the left-of-center New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jack Layton turned to the Prime Minister and let loose the first zinger of the debate: ‘Where is your platform? Under the sweater?’¹³ The subsequent set of tweets clearly demonstrate a largely phatic or parrot-like use of the micro-blogging platform, meaning users either let out ‘wow’-like exclamations or simply reposted Layton’s one-liner, or both.

Reactions to the NDP leader’s jibe also demonstrate a distinct partisan moment between political parties. The succession of 12 posts that repeated or otherwise exalted the witty one-liner over the next minute was only briefly interrupted by one tweet from the centrist Liberal Party of Canada’s campaign account:

(9: 32 pm) Liberal feed: Debates prove Jack Layton just doesn’t get it.

Over the course of the evening, however, the Liberal Party was not the most active political party on Twitter. While all the parties’ known bloggers and online activists took turns supporting their leader and taking apart the responses of their foes, only the NDP actively prepared a rapid-response approach to Twitter on the debate night. Using the @JackLayton account (the name of the NDP’s leader), the NDP sent out a series of ‘fact check’ posts over the course of the two-hour debate, with periodic links to more extensive rebuttals posted on the party’s election website. The party, in short, used the medium to respond to their opponents’ live statements in near real time, adding a whole new temporality to the media spin that typically erupts at the conclusion of televised debates:

(9:53 pm) jacklayton: FACT CHECK: Harper says he is making important investments in science and technology in Canada #ormistondebate.

(9:56 pm) jacklayton: FACT CHECK: Bloc not the only party with a Buy Canada policy – <http://www.ndp.ca/page/7136>.

While a number of users picked up on the tactic and lauded the party for its innovative use of Twitter, other comments suggested that viewers/Twitterers thought that Layton himself was posting such notes live on set:

(10:10 pm) @jacklayton, stop texting from under the table!

(10:57 pm) @jacklayton, explain to me how you are tweeting while the debate is on.

Such confusion might be explained by the early adopters’ lack of established social media conventions, but such strategic use of social media by a political party also highlights one aspect of media personalization deployed during campaign events. Given that social media are built upon a lexicon and architecture of friendship networks, the use of a personalized account by the NDP served to normalize partisan communications within the conventions of social media, while at the same time extending Twitter’s limited

interface time onto their campaign website where additional ‘fact checks’, policies and the party’s campaign platform could be found.

A content analysis of the total number of mentions of the party leaders on the night of the debate concluded that while the NDP leader received substantial attention on Twitter (27 percent of all tweets mentioned Jack Layton), during the course of the live broadcast, it was the first-time participation of the Green Party in Canadian debates that topped the discussion on Twitter. As we see in Figure 2, Elizabeth May, the Green Party’s leader, was mentioned in almost one third (29 percent) of all the tweets during the debate night.

Upon reviewing our data 12 months after the live research project concluded, a series of other findings emerged – evidence that again supports and further qualifies the manner in which Twitter was used tactically by political parties, partisans and other online viewers/users on the debate night. The multi-mediated nature of the debate evening, and in particular the interplay between viewership, social media commentary and partisan campaigning, is also further amplified in a number of posts made during the debate evening. The Canadian federal leaders’ debate happened to coincide with the live broadcast of the debate between US vice-presidential candidates, which, it should be noted, included the controversial yet media-friendly Republican nominee Sarah Palin. At the very outset of the Canadian debate a number of users posted tweets referring to the use of multiple screens, online video streams and the switching of TV sets to catch one or the other debate:

(9:19 pm) Watching #vpdebate on CNN and #cldbdeb08 on CBC live stream #ormistondebate.

(9:21 pm) Just changed to the US VP Debate because so far it’s better than watching Jack Layton and Elizabeth May attack @pmharper. Will go back soon.

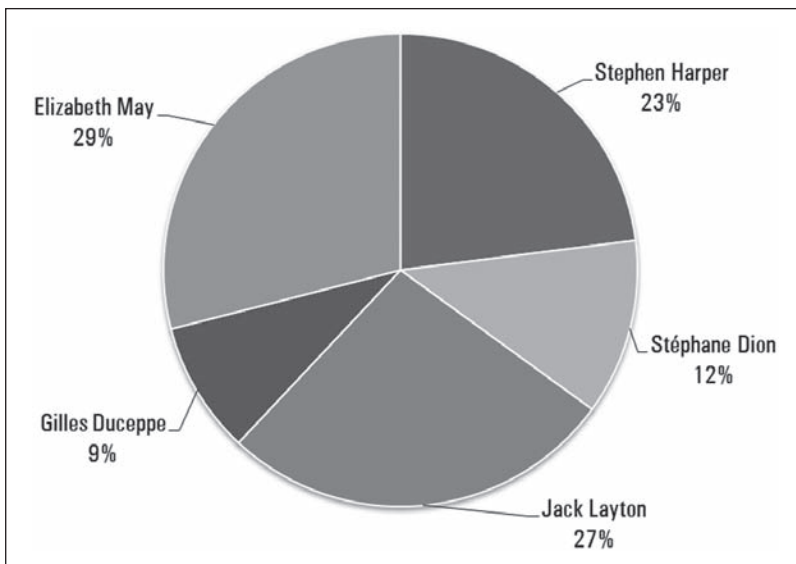


Figure 2. ‘Twittering about the leaders’ (broadcast on 2 October 2008 on CBC national news).

Other users engaged yet more social media platforms, in this instance the digital-photo hosting site Flickr, to capture and share their experiences of watching the Canadian leaders debate.

(10:07 pm) The 5 leaders as they appear on my TV set. Elizabeth May <http://flickr.com/photos/sarahroger/2908875540/>.

After retrospectively reviewing data from the debate night, curiously absent is an expansion of Twitter's interface time onto other Web-based political documents. Apart from the previously noted NDP hyperlinks to their campaign website, of all the tweets posted during the live debate only two include links to other relevant documents. Such a finding seems counterintuitive given Twitter's predominate convention today of sharing links to articles, YouTube videos, Wikipedia and the like. While one of these posted links is rather whimsical, using a Web link to lyrics of a popular song to lampoon the NDP leader's choice of words,¹⁴ the other is more tactically relevant in terms of expanding the sphere of the debate. At the outset of the debate, upon hearing the Green Party's leader cite a report on the economy, a user finds the document and shares it online:

(9:18 pm) Here's a link to the OECD report Elizabeth May's talking about: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/55/40912642.pdf>.

Lastly, efforts to tactically manage – as opposed to perhaps simply expand – Twitter's interface time were also clearly evident in the hours leading up to the televised debate. A debate over an appropriate hashtag for the event quickly degenerated into partisan bickering and balkanization, with online Conservatives promoting the use of the hashtag #cdndeb08. There were, in short, decidedly partisan and institutional elements to various attempts at promoting specific hashtags, including the one used by the CBC's Ormiston Online project. Indeed, from the outset some Conservative bloggers took offense to the CBC's promotion of the #ormistondebate hashtag, with some partisans questioning my own role in this process:

@greg_elmer ... Did you play a part in setting up Ormiston to monitor the following twitter tag #ormistondebate?

Such after-the-fact findings, while further qualifying the expansion of both the time and space (screens and platforms) of micro-blogging during a live broadcast event, also highlight the limits of real-time research, and in particular the inability to conduct expansive, time-consuming reviews of data. Real-time or 'live' research is a bit of a misnomer in that it requires the pre-setting of a research agenda, a method of data collection, and, in this instance at least, a heavy reliance upon other forms of near real-time comparative data (e.g. the CBC's debate transcripts). Live research should therefore be viewed and understood as an effort at developing methods of collecting and analyzing data flows on platforms that hyper-accentuate the present, rather than simply enacting research and analysis in real time.

Conclusions

The collaboration discussed in this article offered a number of researchers the ability to intervene in public debates about the role that new media platforms play in important social and political issues of our day; or in this instance, in the very discourse enacted by our country's political leaders. Scholars of new media suffer perhaps more than most in their frustrations at seeing their work – particularly time-sensitive research – delayed for many months and sometimes years. This, however, is not a call to do away with established forms of peer review and scholarly publishing, but rather to question how new theories, methods and venues for publishing and otherwise making research findings public can begin to address the growing importance of real-time media as a distinct event into itself (e.g. a debate or media event such as a weather-related disaster), or a series of micro-events that in sum offer researchers insight into the structure and effect of 'political cycles', as Chadwick (2011) notes. Live research, as such, serves not only to question and understand the interface time of social media practices and platforms, but also challenges the time-compressed and space-delimited sphere of academic scholarship.

Moving forward, live research needs to distinguish itself as a research project from certain strands of information design – projects that seek to creatively visualize complex datasets and flows in the search for intuitive iconography and dynamic flux (Abrams and Hall, 2006). Live research, in other words, should not only be concerned with re-presenting the world of things or their imprints, but rather work to offer concepts, theories and methods that might critically understand how users mobilize and sustain texts and other digital objects (by uploading, sharing, remixing and downloading) across the field of networked communication. Live research, as such, could serve as an important contingent step in recognizing the ever-shifting social media plane and the tactics deployed to sustain meaningful communication in a socially networked media age.

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Notes

1. See Sysomos' September 2010 social media marketing study. Available at <http://sysomos.com/insidetwitter/engagement>.
2. For an early insider's view of the emergence of rapid-response political tactics in the context of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) see Myers (1993).
3. The case study focused on Canada's fortieth general election. The campaign officially began on 7 September 2008 and ended on voting day, 14 October 2008. More details can be found on the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=ele&document=in dex&dir=pas/40ge&lang=e).
4. Canadian convention for televised debates is typically to broadcast in both of Canada's official languages, English and French. This study focuses exclusively on the English-language debate broadcast on 2 October 2008, although a dry run of our methods was informally tested during the French-language debate held the day earlier.
5. The platform launched worldwide in July 2006.

6. A number of projects have since investigated how more established Twitter conventions can help understand the nature of audience feedback and interaction during live broadcast debates. See Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011: 7). See also www.infoscapelab.ca/ontarioelection2007.
8. An archive of the Ormiston Online project can be found at www.cbc.ca/news/canadavotes/campaign2/ormiston/.
9. At the time, YouTube provided only total cumulative views of videos. Working with the platform's API, we wrote a software script that determined on a weekly basis how many views a video received.
10. A number of the posted tweets made reference to switching back and forth between the Canadian party leaders' and American vice-presidential televised debates.
11. The search terms and hashtags included #ormistondebate, the Twitter account names for the Canadian party leaders and campaigns ('jacklayton', 'LiberalTour', 'Pmharper', 'ElizabethMay', 'gillesduceppe') and the search terms 'jack layton', 'elizabeth may', 'gilles duceppe', 'stephane dion' and 'stephen harper'. The total sample included 558 tweets.
12. The search terms and hashtags included #ormistononline, the Twitter account names for the party leaders and campaigns (i.e. jacklayton, LiberalTour, Pmharper, ElizabethMay, gillesduceppe), and the formal names of the federal party leaders ('jack layton', 'elizabeth may', 'gilles duceppe', 'stephane dion', and 'stephen harper'). The total sample included 558 tweets.
13. The comment was made in reference to the Conservatives' lack of a formal party platform and an advertisement depicting the Conservative Prime Minister in an atypically informal sweater.
14. 'I'm sure it's a coincidence but Jack Layton just paraphrased a Propagandhi song.'

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