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Abstract

Audiences play a fundamental role in disseminating and evaluating news content, and one of the big questions facing news organizations is what elements make content viral in the digital environment. This comparative study of the United States, Brazil and Argentina explores what values and topics present in news shared online predict audience interaction on social media. Findings shed light on what news values and topics trigger more audience responses on Facebook and Twitter. At the same time, a comparison between popular content produced by traditional media versus online-native media reveals that the former lean more toward government-related news and conflict/controversy news values than online native media. Brazilian stories prompted more social media interactivity than content from the United States or Argentina. Through content analysis, this study contributes to improving our understanding of audiences' news values preferences on social networks. It also helps us to recognize the role of users' online activities (sharing, commenting and liking) in the social construction of news and meaning inside the networked sphere. Finally, it opens an old media debate about whether providing and sharing too much media content with conflict, controversy and oddity could potentially hinder understanding and agreement in society. Articles were collected via media tracking and the data collection company NewsWhip..

KEYWORDS news topics; news values; online media; online native; online shares; social media; social recommendations; traditional media

Introduction

In the past 20 years, the digital revolution has changed the distribution and communication practices between news organizations and audiences. Social media platforms have played a salient role in connecting news outlets with increasingly social and participatory online audiences. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer unique interactive features, which allow for instant distribution of news content to potentially global audiences (Siapera and Veglis 2012). Studies show that in the United States, most consumers of online news access news via social media (Purcell et al. 2010), and more than half of Twitter users post links to articles (Smith and Rainie 2010).

Users of social media find themselves in a position of power: their roles as active audiences are increasingly important for distributing information throughout digital networks. Social media interactions—liking, sharing and commenting—have become a source of gatekeeping influence for audiences, allowing researchers to evaluate audience reception and interaction with news content. This study posits questions about how audiences interact with online content as it is categorized by news values and topics. What journalistic values and news topics receive the most social recommendations through sharing, liking and commenting on these platforms?

In addition to exploring the relationship between social shares and journalistic news values and topics, this study is also interested in news media unique to the digital era: the native online publication. Unlike traditional organizations that had to adapt practices from print to digital, online native organizations were created with the digital audience in mind. Thus, this study also examines whether audiences respond differently on social media to traditional and native online news content. Finally, despite the potential for global interaction, political, cultural

and economical constraints pose serious pressures to news distribution. Accordingly, this research explores in what ways social media activities vary by publications from different countries (the United States, Brazil and Argentina, three of the largest democracies in this hemisphere), further nuancing this analysis with an overarching look at the evolving global digital environment.

This study highlights the complexities of journalism content and social interaction in the virtual democratic sphere, adding to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the relationship between journalistic norms and values, and audience's desires. In a global forum with worldwide distribution potential and limitless audience possibilities, are there universal attributes in content shared via social media? Or are these realities more segmented by country, type of media organization and content preference?

Literature Review

Social Recommendations of News Values and Topics

The purposes of this section are twofold: first, to analyze how news values have historically played an important role in the selection of events for both journalists and audiences; and second, to review studies that have analyzed the elements that make content spreadable on social media.

News values. First, news values are believed to be at the core of journalistic practices. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) defined news judgment as the ability to evaluate stories based on some common criteria that make the event selection consistent for gatekeepers, and predict the interest of the audience. Academic researchers, aiming to understand how news values influence the information selection process, have developed numerous typologies and definitions. Lippmann (1946) was the first scholar to describe attributes such as sensationalism, proximity, relevance, unambiguity and facticity as elements that offer news values to events. After Lippmann, comprehensive news values lists have been developed for the purpose of understanding what events are relevant for news, and how media workers select information according to certain characteristics (Tuchman 1973; Schulz 1982; Allern 2002). Even though these studies have been useful as guides to understand news selection, they are constantly challenged by social, cultural and economic changes (O'Neill and Harcup 2009).

Empirical studies have shown that news values are not only considered part of the journalistic selection criteria, but they are also factors that guide audiences' selection processes (Eilders 2006). To make sense of the information flow, users seem to utilize the same schemas employed by journalists to determine the relevance of an event. Schulz (1982) was one of the first to analyze the impact of news values on the audience perception of salience. Continuing with this tradition, Eilders (2006, 9) theorized that key news factors are part of the "general human selection criteria," which conditions audiences' selection and retention of information for psychological reasons. Journalists usually present the newsworthy elements more prominently in their stories, and audiences are likely to follow the same selection process when reading news.

More recently, studies have explored online settings to understand how social media can modify news sharing, values and consumption. In their analysis of Canadian social media users, Hermida et al. (2012) found that sharing news via social media has become "central" to the news experience, as users report they were more likely to get links to news stories from friends and family members' recommendations on social media than from the social media accounts of journalists or news outlets. In fact, about two-thirds of survey respondents said they valued the ability to share content on social media. Trilling, Tolochko, and Burscher (2016) concluded that proximity was a crucial news value that predicted news sharing on social media while conflict and human interest proved also relevant but less important than domestic issues when testing shareworthiness in the Netherlands.

Because of the influence of personal networks to shape the future of news, one of the main inquiries for media is what allows some news stories to obtain higher social recommendations than others. All forms of media are taking advantage of these new driving technological forces to measure the appeal of stories according to audience interest and recommendations. Thanks to social media and other interactive digital tools, audiences are now participating vigorously in the process of disseminating, recommending and modifying content. Clicking, sharing, liking and commenting on social networks are powerful forms of distribution (Tenenboim and Cohen 2015) that privilege and challenge news values as one-third of internet users participate in the creation of dissemination of news via social media (Purcell et al. 2010). Typologies of news values and topics continue to be helpful to understand the shifting nature of digital technology.

News topics. Besides news values, other content-related factors such as news topics, as well as the elements related to articles' form (e.g., ranking, presentation), are gaining momentum in academic inquiry (Kumpel, Karnowski, and Keyling 2015). For instance, Bright (2016) found that stories about politics, disasters and crime were poorly shared while content about technology and science was more spreadable because users avoid complicated topics that can cause reputational damage. The potential shareability of other news topics—such as those listed in the Comparative Agendas Project's codebook (www.comparativeagendas.net), comprising 21 major topics and 220 subtopics—have been barely explored, though.

Investigating situational factors, Berger and Milkman (2012) concluded that content that evokes strong positive or negative sentiment becomes more shareable than stories that evoke low-arousal. In fact, researchers have come to one recurrent conclusion: content that excites users is more easily shared and has the potential to become viral (Dobele et al. 2007). Kim (2015) found that users share more news articles that hold controversial and emotional features. Similarly, interesting content, trust in the sources, and news values such as controversy, relevance or surprise (Rudat, Buder, and Hesse 2014) have a strong association with sharing news.

In light of the networked audience, an analysis of social recommendations is fundamental, as "understanding not only what content users will want to consume but also what content they are likely to pass along may be a key to how stories are put together and even what stories get covered in the first place" (Olmstead, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel 2011, 1). Therefore, knowing which topics and stories are shared via social media provides a better understanding of the networked news flow and the way in which social media are disrupting other media flows and reshaping "the industry's relationship with audiences" (Hermida et al. 2012, 817). For these reasons, this study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: What news values can predict an effect in (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares?

RQ2: What news topics can predict an effect in (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares?

Social Recommendations of News Values and Topics

Early studies indicated that journalists and news organizations around the world used the internet in accordance with the same norms and routines traditionally used offline (Singer 2005; Hermida and Thurman 2008). Research showed online media outlets in general still operate under traditional norms, limiting and monitoring user contributions to ensure they align with traditional journalistic values and cultures (Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida and Thurman 2008; Bachmann and Harlow 2012). These works showed offline content was shoveled online, with traditional journalists failing to take full advantage of the internet's multi-way communication potential, instead using online platforms as merely another venue for dissemination (Singer 2005).

More recent studies examining news outlets' official social media accounts reveal a similar "traditional" pattern of one-way distribution: content is shoveled onto Twitter or some other social media platform, mostly in the form of headlines and story links (Blasingame 2011; Messner, Linke, and Eford 2012). Studies show journalists also apply traditional norms and routines to Twitter, using the social media platform to gather, report and distribute the news (Gulyas 2013), adhering mostly to traditional conventions of journalism as a lecture and product, rather than a conversation and service (Artwick 2013). Extending established journalistic norms to Twitter is what Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) referred to as normalization. In their study of mainstream journalists' Twitter practices, Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) found that while journalists more freely expressed opinions on Twitter, in general they mostly normalized that social media to fit into their existing norms and routines, rather than adapting their practices. The study indicated that journalists at elite news outlets were more likely than those at less elite outlets to adhere to existing norms and values.

Similarly, native online media are believed to publish more cutting-edge content and take more risks on the Web than traditional media (García-Perdomo, Citationin press; Brown and Sinta 2016). Entrepreneurial, native online news sites arose in response to the changing media landscape and a journalism field shaken by new technologies and a need for new business models (Rajan 2007; Köroğlu and Tingöy 2011; Hernández Soto 2012). Native online media are partially responsible for creating innovative forms of content and formatting that have imposed different dynamics in the production, consumption and distribution of information on the Web (Brown, Harlow, García-Perdomo, and Salaverría, Citationin press). Studies have noted that these sites are focused on technological innovations, and have embraced innovative practices aimed at "reinvent[ing] journalism as socially relevant, but also as profitable" (Cohen 2015, 517). Listicles, gif-animated images, memes and short social videos showing a particular event from users' points of view are examples of increasingly popular formats in native online media, like BuzzFeed, and social media (O'Donovan 2013). Recent research suggests that native online media's ability to innovate practices and products, interact with audiences and create communities, and ultimately distinguish themselves from traditional mainstream media is key to success (Harlow and Salaverría 2016). With the understanding that native online media are attempting to offer something new and different from traditional media, this present study extends Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton's (2012) findings by looking at values from the audience's perspective and examining whether traditional elite outlets' stories emphasizing traditional values were more or less likely to be shared than those from native online-only media outlets.

RQ3a: Are there significant associations between traditional online media news values and online native media news values in articles shared, liked and commented on via Facebook and Twitter?

RQ3b: Are there significant associations between traditional online media article topics and online native media article topics shared, liked and commented on via Facebook and Twitter?

Globalization in Online Journalism

During the last two decades, digital technologies have triggered various disruptions in the traditional models of journalism, leading to radical changes in the media business, the journalists' profiles, the editorial processes, the news storytelling formats and even in the relationship of the media with their audiences. One of the most obvious changes has been the breaking of geographic boundaries for the dissemination of news content, enabling the configuration of a global sphere for digital journalism (Siapera and Veglis 2012). Since the contemporary world was described as a global village (McLuhan 1962), in the recent half century the evolution of society in general (Robertson 1992), and the media in particular (Merrill 1983; Smith 1991; Barker 1999), have been repeatedly linked to the phenomenon of globalization. However, as it has been highlighted in recent studies, the globalization process of journalism shows characteristics that should be interpreted in a nuanced way in order to avoid falling into maximalist interpretations (Cottle 2009; Reese 2010).

As far as the present study is concerned, research has detected a duality in the evolution of news values in the globalized context. On the one hand, it has been found that news values associated with western journalism are indeed globally widespread (Shoemaker and Cohen 2006) but, on the other hand, it has also been found that the ways these news values are implemented varies notably depending on the country (Campbell 2004; Mellor 2005; Waheed et al. 2013). Archetti (2010), in her study of eight elite print newspapers across four countries, attributed these differences between countries to three main factors: national interest, national journalistic culture and the editorial policy of each media organization. In other words, according to this analysis, what ultimately defines newsworthiness is not a global and general understanding of what news is, but specific conditions mainly related to each country and even to each media company. However, does the global reach of online media induce changes in how news values are implemented?

In recent years, several cross-national studies have comparatively explored the ways in which digital media act in their national contexts, as well as how they interact with their target audiences (Van der Wurff and Lauf 2005; Quandt 2008; Newman and Levy 2014). These studies have shown that, indeed, despite a general context of globalization that tends to homogenize the content of media, local specificities survive in each national online news market. There is still little research, however, on the ways news values operate in digital media (Schaudt and Carpenter 2009; Dick 2014; Cleary et al. 2015), and even less on how these values have been adopted by social media users (Bro and Wallberg 2015). With different intensities, these studies indicate an evolution from the traditional hierarchy of news values operating in the print media to a new order of values in digital media. In this context of global transition, it is worth exploring not only how the hierarchy of news values has evolved in a digital environment, but also if those values have developed differently depending on the country.

Thus, considering the preceding literature regarding media globalization, this study poses the following research questions.

RQ4a: Are there significant associations between Argentine, Brazilian and US media news values shared on Facebook and Twitter?

RQ4b: Are there significant associations between Argentine, Brazilian and US media news topics shared on Facebook and Twitter?

RQ5: How do Argentine, Brazilian and US news media differ on (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares?

Method

In order to understand better what kinds of news articles published by traditional and online native media are most shared on social media, this study relied on a content analysis of 600 articles published by one native and one traditional online media outlet in three of the largest democracies in this hemisphere (200 articles from each country): United States, Brazil and Argentina. The selection of these three countries is justified by the following reasons. First, it allows comparison of three robust national media markets that share some common elements but, at the same time, enjoy their own features. Such combination of homogeneity and specificity makes these countries very suitable for a

comparative study like this one. Among the common elements of these three countries, there is a geographical aspect: the three of them are large, highly populated countries of the Americas. Additionally, they share a very relevant characteristic: all have diverse and consolidated online media markets, comprised of a combination of mainstream and online native publications, and high social media use. On the other hand, these three countries have their own features. These specificities begin, for instance, with their respective languages: English, Portuguese and Spanish. Different news agendas and interests can be analyzed in each of these three countries. Publications selected for this sample were the US newspaper The New York Times and online site The Huffington Post, the Brazilian newspaper Folha de S. Paulo—UOL and online native site G1, and the Argentine newspaper Clarín and online site MinutoUno.com.

Articles were collected via media tracking and the data collection company NewsWhip. NewsWhip tracks more than 100,000 publications worldwide, cataloging the articles posted online and the social media activity resulting from those articles. The NewsWhip database archives Facebook and Twitter interactions for each article in terms of Facebook shares, comments and likes, as well as Twitter shares. While NewsWhip collects all data, researchers were only able to download 10,000 articles shared at least once by social media audiences, and each article's coordinating social media information was downloaded for each publication. The corpus reflects articles that were shared at least once on the Facebook platform—currently the largest social media platform in the world—indicating that all news stories had at least some interactivity with audiences in the social media sphere. Though this decision yields a sample not representative of the totality of online native and traditional media sites' content, the sampling procedure is most useful for the purposes of this study because it reflects articles that were either shared from the news organizations' original website to the Facebook platform by readers, or that were pushed by the organization itself to the social media platform.

A random sample of 100 articles then was selected from each publication for the entire year of 2014, resulting in a final sample of 600 articles. This total sample size exceeds the suggested sample size needed for a 95 percent confidence level and a ±5 percent margin of error (Neuendorf 2002). Of those articles, 14 were part of the Canadian Huffington Post. These stories were removed and replaced by articles from the US edition. Four coders, all authors in this study, participated in the coding.

Reliability tests were performed on a random sample of 50 stories as recommended by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2014). Three additional coding sequences were conducted until acceptable inter-coder reliability scores were consistently achieved for all variables. Krippendorff's alpha was used to calculate inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff 2004). Alpha values ranged from 0.698 to 1.00 and the specific values are described below.

Measures

Two media outlets were selected from each country: one online native, the other a traditional media site.

Online native news organizations.

- *The Huffington Post* (United States): *The Huffington Post* is a US online native media site with editions in roughly 20 countries around the world. This international multiplicity has placed it as the online native media leader worldwide, with a monthly audience exceeding 200 million unique users.

- *G1* (Brazil): G1 is an online native portal that is part of the group Globo, one of the main media companies not only in Brazil. It was launched in 2006 as a digital product independent from other traditional media of Globo. In 2015, it became the leading digital media site in Brazil.

- *Minutouno.com* (Argentina): Owned by the private communication company Indalo Media, *Minutouno.com* is the online native site with the largest audience in Argentina.

Traditional online media outlets.

- *NYTimes.com* (United States): According to information provided by ComScore, *NYTimes.com* in 2015 had more than 57 million unique visitors each month, and was the No. 1 individual newspaper site in the United States.

- *Folha de S. Paulo—UOL* (Brazil): According to the Instituto Verificador de Circulação of Brazil, *Folha de Sao Paulo* was the leading Brazilian daily by circulation, as of the beginning of 2015. On the Web, its content is offered by the UOL portal (Universo Online), owned by the same publisher, the Folha Group. The UOL portal has more than 50 million unique visitors.

- *Clarin.com* (Argentina): *Clarín* is one of the most important traditional newspapers of general information in Argentina. According to ComScore, in October 2014, its digital edition reported the largest media audience among Spanish Latin American publications.

Independent variables

News values. This study utilizes the definition and most recent comprehensive summary of news values provided by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) based on different classical approaches such as Stephens (1980). A total of seven news values were included in the codebook. Each one of the variables was coded as 1/0 for presence/not presence of the values. Timeliness includes breaking news and/or current events, as well as events relative to time, including discoveries of historical events ($\alpha = 0.814$). Prominence and impact combines principles of news written about celebrities and prominent figures; impact and overall importance, impacting persons, either physically or emotionally, on a national or international scale ($\alpha = 0.878$). Conflict and controversy highlights elements of disagreement and open clashes between individuals as well as clashes with institutions ($\alpha = 0.751$). Human-interest stories appeal to emotion and personal feeling, emphasizing the details and uniqueness of a person or subject ($\alpha = 0.846$). Proximity features closeness of the occurrence to the audience, gauged either geographically—close or perceived "local" events are more important than distant ones—or in terms of the assumed values, interest and expectations of the news audience; coders used publication location as medium ($\alpha = 0.942$). Unusual includes strange, extraordinary, peculiar or singular events, specifically scenarios which are uncommon or are considered remarkable or abnormal ($\alpha = 0.849$). Usefulness includes articles written to inform readers about concepts or ideas that may be useful in everyday life, or help readers achieve or accomplish a task. This category includes cooking ideas, health tips and ideas for hobbies ($\alpha = 0.895$).

News topics. Categories are drawn from the Comparative Agendas Project's master codebook, a coding schema employed by various policy-agenda and media scholars for analyzing content, including The New York Times articles, congressional data, Supreme Court decisions and Gallup poll survey data (Boydstun 2013). The Policy Agendas Codebook's 27 major topics were collapsed into 14 categories: international affairs ($\alpha = 0.95$); military/defense ($\alpha = 0.768$); government/politics ($\alpha = 0.864$); crime and enforcement ($\alpha = 0.855$); sports ($\alpha = 1$); economy, business and finance ($\alpha = 0.698$); civil rights ($\alpha = 1$); education ($\alpha = 0.947$); entertainment ($\alpha = 0.914$); environment ($\alpha = 1$); religion ($\alpha = 0.793$); odd news ($\alpha = 0.926$); lifestyle/health ($\alpha = 0.806$); and science/technology ($\alpha = 1$). After coding was completed, due to low frequencies of occurrence, religion and education were combined with lifestyle/health to make a new category renamed life/society; this decision is justified by the fact that, in many news media, these topics are frequently grouped in that news section. Finally, military/defense was combined with government/politics to create a new category named government/politics and defense; and environment was included in the science category. Each one of the variables was coded as 1/0 for presence/not presence of the news topics.

Dependent variables

NewsWhip catalogued information on social media interaction for each story. However, an early exploration of the data revealed that all our social recommendation variables were positively skewed; that is, scores were clustering together at the lower end of the range [Facebook shares (mean = 1523.84, SE = 265.660, minimum (min) = 4, maximum (max) = 64,920, skewness = 7.309), Facebook comments (mean = 787.66, SE = 120.020, min = 0, max = 38,383, skewness = 8.419), Facebook likes (mean = 3314, SE = 503.692, min = 0, max = 172,529, skewness = 8.152), Twitter shares (mean = 224.83, SE = 19.777, min = 0, max = 5859, skewness = 7.112)]. All the distributions in this case were non-symmetrical and positively skewed. In order to do parametric testing using these data as outcome variables, one of the assumptions is that the dependent variables and its residuals must have a normal distribution. Because one of the main goals of this research is to understand the effect of news values and news topics on social recommendations, the sample was normalized to correct the distribution and the large standard deviation of shares, likes and comments. Two dependent variables of interest were created for this purpose: Facebook social recommendations and Twitter shares.

Facebook social recommendations. This variable was obtained by adding three social media interactions on Facebook—shares, comments and likes—in order to gauge the total Facebook activity around articles selected for the sample. After adding all Facebook social recommendations, the new variable continued to be positive skewed (mean = 5626.39, SE = 807.8243, min = 8, max = 244,825, skewness = 6.891). Consequently, we decided to log transform this Facebook variable in SPSS to normalize its distribution. After the log transformation, the

distribution of the final variable, Facebook social recommendations, looked normal (mean = 2.8586, SE = 0.3564, skewness = 0.167), and met one of the basic assumptions to conduct parametric testing.

Twitter shares. Twitter shares contains the total number of times a link of a particular article across the Twitter API (application programming interface) was tweeted, the number of times a link was re-tweeted, and the number of times a link was shared via Twitter from a news organization's website. It does not include replies that do not have the link. As the variable Twitter shares was positive skewed (mean = 224.83, SE = 19.777, min = 0, max = 5859, skewness = 7.112), it was log transformed in SPSS (+1) to normalize its distribution (mean = 1.9, SE = 0.68 skewness = −0.487).

Data analysis

To test the research questions posed in this study, we employed data collected by the software NewsWhip, and conducted content analysis over an appropriated sample. To answer the first set of questions, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The independent variables (news values and news topics) were entered in a single block to understand the effect of values and topics on the dependent variables: (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares. The second set of questions required an association analysis between categorical variables to find the relationship between traditional online media news values/topics and online native media values/topics in articles shared via social media. To answer the third set of questions, this study employed two different statistical procedures. First, cross-tabulations were run to find significant associations between the three countries (the United States, Brazil and Argentina), and news values and topics. Second, a one-way ANOVA test was performed to grasp whether there was significant effect of (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares on the countries' mean.

Results

Social recommendations were normalized in order to correct the distribution and the large standard deviation of shares, likes and comments. Of the 600 articles coded, the most common news value employed was timeliness (45.2 percent), followed by conflict and controversy (42 percent), impact and prominence (33.3 percent), proximity (20.2 percent), lifestyle and health (18.3 percent), human interest (14 percent) and usefulness (9.2 percent). In terms of topics, most articles were related to government/politics and defense (30.2 percent), followed by crime and enforcement (22.2 percent), economy/banking/finance (17 percent), international affairs (14.7 percent), odd news (13.7 percent), entertainment (12 percent), sports (9 percent), civil rights (6.5 percent), science and technology (6 percent), environment (4.8 percent), education (3.5 percent), defense (2 percent) and religion (1.7 percent).

News values and topics

RQ1 asked what news values have an effect in (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares. To answer this question, this study conducted a linear regression analysis to observe the effect of the independent variables (news values) in the total number of interactions in both Facebook and Twitter. Results showed that articles with news values about human interest ($\beta = 0.164$, $p < 0.000$), conflict and controversy ($\beta = 0.168$, $p < 0.01$), unusual ($\beta = 0.119$, $p < 0.01$), impact and prominence ($\beta = 0.115$, $p < 0.05$), and usefulness ($\beta = 0.102$, $p < 0.05$) positively predicted an increase in the total number of Facebook social recommendations, while timeliness ($\beta = −0.160$, $p < 0.000$) had a negative effect on Facebook interactions. The independent variables (news values) included in this analysis explained 7.4 percent of the total variance in Facebook social recommendations. Similarly, stories with human interest ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < 0.01$) and conflict and controversy ($\beta = 0.114$, $p < 0.05$) proved positive predictors of Twitter shares. News values explained 3 percent of the total variance in Twitter shares (Table 1).

RQ2 inquired whether news topics had an effect on the number of (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares. Two regressions were conducted using news topics as predictors and Facebook social recommendations and Twitter shares as the dependent variables. Articles with topics about entertainment ($\beta = 0.109$, $p < 0.05$), life/society ($\beta = 0.112$, $p < 0.05$) and oddity ($\beta = 0.102$, $p < 0.05$) were significantly and positively related to the total number of Facebook social recommendations, while sports ($\beta = −0.101$, $p < 0.05$) had a negative effect on Facebook interactions. In the case of Twitter, only odd news ($\beta = 0.034$, $p < 0.01$) showed a positive effect on shares and interactions. The independent variables (news topics) explained 9.5 percent of the total variance in social recommendations (Table 2).

RQ3a aimed to find the relationship between media news values and online native media values in articles shared via Facebook and Twitter. The study used association analysis between categorical variables (crosstabs) to find the strength and the significance of the relationship between news values shared on social networks and the type of media (traditional or online native) (Table 3).

The results revealed a significant relationship between the two groups in news values related to timeliness and conflict and controversy: more online native media articles (51.8 percent) with timeliness as a news value (X2 = 4.320, df = 1, p < 0.01) were shared than traditional media stories coded as timely (38.5 percent). More traditional media stories (47.2 percent) with conflict and controversy as a news value (X2 = 6.643, df = 1, p < 0.05) were shared than conflict/controversy online native articles (36.8 percent).

RQ3b asked if there is a relationship between traditional online media article topics and online native media article topics shared, liked and commented on via Facebook and Twitter. A cross-tabulation analysis was conducted in order to see the associations between media type and topics (Table 4).

Results showed a significant association between traditional and online native media when it came to the topic of government/politics and defense: more traditional media (37.9 percent) than online native media articles shared (25.4 percent) were about government/politics and defense (X2 = 10.754, df = 1, p < 0.01).

Social Media Recommendations by Country

Results showed a significant association between traditional and online native media when it came to the topic of government/politics and defense: more traditional media (37.9 percent) than online native media articles shared (25.4 percent) were about government/politics and defense (X2 = 10.754, df = 1, p < 0.01).

RQ4a looked into significant associations between Argentine, Brazilian and US media news values shared by audiences.

Results demonstrated more shared Argentine articles (54.5 percent) were coded as timely (X2 (df = 2, N = 600) = 14.590, p < 0.01) than articles in the United States (35.5 percent) or Brazil (45.5 percent). In terms of impact and prominence (X2 (df = 2, N = 600) = 10.545, p < 0.01), more shared articles were from Brazil (42 percent) than Argentina (30.5 percent) or the United States (27.5 percent). The conflict and controversy news value (X2 (df = 2, N = 600) = 6.691, p < 0.05) was more frequent in Argentina (47.5 percent) than the United States (35 percent) or Brazil (43.5 percent). Human interest (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 26.246, p < 0.001) was adopted most in the United States (24 percent), followed by Brazil (11 percent) and Argentina (7 percent). More Brazilian (36 percent) articles employed the proximity value (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 72.817, p < 0.001) than articles in the United States (2 percent) or Argentina (22.5 percent). The unusual news value (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 10.709, p < 0.01) was more common among Argentine stories (24 percent) than stories in the United States (11.5 percent) or Brazil (19.5 percent). Lastly, more US articles (14.5 percent) used the usefulness news value (X2 (df = 2, N = 600), p < 0.01) than stories in Brazil (8 percent) or Argentina (5 percent) (Table 5).

RQ4b aimed to find significant associations between Argentine, Brazilian and US media news topics shared on Facebook and Twitter.

Results showed the entertainment news topic (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 10.332, p < 0.01) was more frequently present in stories from the United States (18 percent) than in Brazil (9.5 percent) and Argentina (8.5 percent). Likewise, more US (28.5 percent, 11.5 percent) articles were coded as life/society (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 23.532, p < 0.000) and civil rights topics (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 12.505, p < 0.01) than articles in Brazil (16.5 percent, 4.5 percent), and Argentina (10 percent, 3.5 percent) respectively. Crime (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 7.786, p < 0.05) was adopted most in Argentina (27.5 percent) followed by Brazil (23 percent) and the United States (16 percent). Similarly, more Argentine news (15.5 percent) belonged to sports (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 15.751, p < 0.000) than in Brazil (6.5 percent) and the United States (5 percent). Odd news (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 12.233, p < 0.01) was also more common in Argentine social media shares (19.5 percent) than in Brazilian articles (14 percent) and the United States (7.5 percent). Finally, more Brazilian shared articles (21.5 percent) fit into the topic of economy/banking/finance (X2 (df = 2, N= 600) = 10.702, p < 0.01) than articles from Argentina (19.5 percent) and the United States (10 percent) (Table 6).

RQ5 looked into the variance between Argentine, Brazilian and US news media in the context of (a) Facebook social recommendations and (b) Twitter shares (Tables 7–10).

Results of an ANOVA showed significant effect of the number of Facebook social recommendations $F_{(2, 597)}= 239.453$, $p < 0.000$, and Twitter shares $F_{(2, 597)}= 75.190$, $p < 0.000$ on the three countries. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated, in the case of Facebook social recommendations, that Brazil's mean score (mean = 3.47) was significantly higher than the scores from the United States (mean = 3.03) and Argentina (mean = 2.07), meaning that Brazil was the country that received considerably more Facebook interactions than the other two countries. Also, the US mean score (mean = 3.03) proved significantly higher than the Argentine mean score (mean = 2.07). Thus, Argentina was the country that significantly less Facebook interactions received in comparison with the other two countries of the region. Regarding Twitter shares, another Tukey test revealed that the Argentine mean score (mean = 1.48) again was significantly lower than the US (mean = 2.14) and the Brazilian (mean = 2.10) scores. Findings revealed that the effect of Twitter shares was smaller in Argentina than in the other two countries. Lastly, the Brazilian mean score did not significantly differ from the United States in the case of Twitter interactions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This content analysis set out to explore how topics and journalistic values of news stories influenced social media interactivity in the United States, Brazil and Argentina. Further, this study examined whether there were differences between traditional online media and online native media when it came to the most popular articles on social media. Better understanding about which news stories get liked, commented on and shared the most is important, not just in a practical sense for media outlets seeking to attract and maintain audiences' interest, but also for shedding light on how journalistic news values and topics might be shifting to fit the demands of publics that can make or break a story thanks to the control social media has given them. Thus, this study is important for offering insight into the "networked audience" (Marwick and Boyd 2011), whose patterns of sharing on social media could be shaping what news stories are covered and how they are covered in both traditional and native online media in three of the largest democracies in this hemisphere.

Generally, this study showed that across the three countries, most articles were about government and politics, and timeliness was the news value employed most often. More specifically, this study explored the effect of news values and news topics of articles most shared via Facebook and Twitter on social media interactions. Human interest and conflict and controversy appear to be the key news values that triggered both Facebook and Twitter users to share and interact with news articles. Likewise, articles with impact and prominence, useful, and unusual news values prompted more Facebook social recommendations, although those values did not prove to be significant in the context of Twitter shares. The unexpected and dramatic does catch the public's attention on social media, as they more often share and react to such stories produced by traditional and online native media. Users' tendency to privilege these journalistic news values over others continues the discussion about the internet as a virtual environment that promotes emotional information (Dobele et al. 2007). What is more, this study's finding that the unusual news value is related to more Facebook social recommendations is noteworthy as it implies that perhaps that social media platform is promoting extreme cases and events. At the same time, these results may suggest that different dynamics are at play in terms of content flow and production on Twitter and Facebook, as users of the different platforms apply different logics.

The findings of this research build on previous studies that have demonstrated how journalists tend to frame stories in terms of conflict and controversy (De Vreese 2004; Mutz and Reese 2005) and human interest (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000) as a way to attract readers' attention and help audiences make sense of events (Nueman, Just, and Crigler et al. 1992). Results from this research confirm the audience's fascination for peeking into the lives of others, as stories with a human interest news value were by far the most shared, and also prove significant predictors of social recommendations. Findings also indicate Facebook users' preference for sharing stories with unusual and confrontation news characteristics. Articles with a useful news value also proved popular on Facebook among audiences. That perhaps helps explain the seeming proclivity among news outlets for publishing top-10 lists, how-to stories and other similar content. Elements highly valued from a journalistic perspective, such as timeliness and proximity, do not seem to increase social recommendations significantly. Moreover, timely stories were found to reduce the number of Facebook interactions despite the fact that it was the most common journalistic news value in the sample.

In regards to news topics, this study found that articles with oddity prompted more Facebook social recommendations and Twitter shares. Stories about entertainment and life/society also predicted an increase in the total number of Facebook social media recommendations. Results revealed that a combination of soft topics,

like entertainment and odd news, and hard topic news, like life/society, showed a significant and positive effect in Facebook social media recommendations. Conversely, stories about sports seemed to reduce the number of interactions in Facebook. The predicting power of news topics for social media recommendations is relevant for the future of news because what outlets choose to write about matters if the end game is just increasing social media interactivity.

A more nuanced look at news topics and news values revealed significant differences between traditional and online native media of all three countries. When it came to news topic, more traditional than online native media articles shared via social media were about government and politics or crime. In contrast, online native articles about lifestyle topics and sports were shared more than such stories from traditional online media. The finding indicates that social media users adhere to different audience structures that affect the way they share information in these three countries.

Results may suggest that frequenters of traditional media are generally more interested in politics and hard news topics, and thus they also share on social media more content from these sections. On the other hand, readers of online native outlets might not be as interested in hard news from these sources, and thus may be expected to read and share soft news more frequently. The result also makes sense from the media perspective: the fact that online native media outlets might be more inclined to cover soft news than traditional online media outlets might have direct influence in audiences' news preferences when sharing, liking and commenting news from those sites.

Online native media of the three countries selected for this study appear to dominate the realm of current/last minute events, publishing more timely stories than traditional online media, confirming previous studies that highlight online native media's capability to move faster than traditional online media when providing breaking news. On the other hand, traditional online media rely more on the conflict and confrontation news values than do online native media. Patterson (1993) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) have shown traditional media's tendency to present issues such as politics in terms of confrontation. Perhaps traditional media attempt to compensate some of their digital limitations by focusing more on conflict and controversy, knowing that such stories attract the public's eye.

Lastly, in order to contribute to comparative research about social media, this study examined differences in news topics and news values of the most-shared articles on social media between news outlets in the United States, Brazil and Argentina. Although a single medium cannot be equated to an entire national news market, several cross-country studies previously have explored the patterns of a few quality newspapers as indicative of the journalistic systems in their respective countries (Trenz 2004; Van der Wurff and Lauf 2005). The media outlets chosen for this research, both traditional and native, are considered mainstream, quality media in their respective countries. Therefore, their usage patterns are indicative, albeit not conclusive, of the underlying journalistic cultures in their countries.

From this point of view, this study allows us to identify patterns of social sharing of news in three countries. In Argentina, the two media outlets studied consistently showed low levels of interaction on social networks. In contrast, the Brazilian media prompted the most interactivity especially on Facebook: their news stories enjoyed consistently high mean scores in the context of social media engagement. The US media levels of Facebook interactivity fell between the two Latin American countries, showing a medium intensity of engagement on that particular platform. Such findings suggest that perhaps Brazilian social media users are more savvy or more frequent users of social media for news than those in Argentina and the United States, despite the fact that Argentina and the United States have a higher internet penetration rate and higher rate of Facebook use than Brazil. It also could indicate that Brazilian media might be more adept at using social media, catering news to fit the demands of a social media audience. Future research should explore this further to better understand how Brazilian news might be more geared toward a social media platform than news in either the United States or Argentina. It should also investigate why Argentina is falling behind promoting interactivity in both social media platforms.

This variation between countries is also reflected in the different relevance given by their respective media to certain news values and topics. In the two Argentine media outlets, the most common news value was that of timeliness. Meanwhile, in Brazil the key values were, almost at par, conflict/controversy and impact/prominence. Finally, in the US media, the most frequent values were timeliness and conflict/controversy. Despite this variation between countries, the high popularity enjoyed by timeliness, conflict/controversy and impact/prominence as news values should be interpreted as a sign of validity of the classic journalism values in contemporary digital

journalism. These values are more clearly linked to traditional hard and breaking news, whereas other values analyzed in this research, such as human interest, unusual and usefulness, could be understood as more soft news. These findings suggest that not only the online news websites, but also their readers on social networks, still judge the classic news values as highly appealing, although the specific preference for each value varies depending on the country. Regarding news topics, the fact that most stories from US media outlets were significantly about entertainment, life/society and civil rights shows again a combination of soft and hard news social issues as a strategy to increase social media sharing. Meanwhile, Argentina media were more interested in topics related to sports, crime and odd news. One possible explanation of the low shareability in Argentina may be that media there focus on the first two topics, and our results showed that sports is a negative predictor of news sharing, and previous research found that crime is poorly shared on social media. Others factors such as accessibility to news, readership and social contexts might also be responsible for the amount of social media recommendations that an article receives.

These differences detected between countries are consistent with previous studies that indicate that each news market has its own peculiarities leading to different professional standards for their journalists. The present study provides empirical evidence that such different patterns not only apply to the way that journalists evaluate news stories, but also extend to social media users in their interaction with journalistic content.

This content analysis of the most popular articles on social media from traditional and online native media outlets in the United States, Brazil and Argentina thus shows important differences when it comes to sharing, commenting on and liking news stories on social networks. This study is important for understanding audiences' news value and topic preferences, as well as their patterns of selecting and sharing news. The study extends existing scholarship by examining users' social media interactivity in different international contexts and across platforms. Further, by comparing social sharing patterns of stories from traditional media and online native media outlets, this study offers practical implications for media organizations attempting to attract readers and maintain relevancy in a media landscape flooded with news choices. This study is limited in that it represents a small portion of the online activity in the sample that was used, and it did not capture the whole network perspective available via network analysis. At the same time, in the regression models the independent variables (news values and news topics) predicted a small percentage of the variance in social recommendations as other factors may also influence news sharing on social media. Nevertheless, it is valuable for offering insight into the online sharing behavior that contributes to the distribution of content, adding to the social assembling of news. Future studies should explore the interrelationship between online news media and their users to better understand these emerging dynamics.

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Disclosure statement

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