

University of Alabama in Huntsville

**LOUIS**

---

Summer Community of Scholars (RCEU and  
HCR) Project Proposals

Faculty Scholarship

---

1-1-2016

**"This Study will Analyze the Relatively New Phenomenon of  
Traditional News Outlets Reporting on Content from Social Media  
through a Qualitative Content Analysis of Social Media Tweets  
Discussion Threads as Covered By Traditional Media Outlets"**

Calhoun Bell

*University of Alabama in Huntsville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://louis.uah.edu/rceu-proposals>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Bell, Calhoun, "This Study will Analyze the Relatively New Phenomenon of Traditional News Outlets Reporting on Content from Social Media through a Qualitative Content Analysis of Social Media Tweets Discussion Threads as Covered By Traditional Media Outlets" (2016). *Summer Community of Scholars (RCEU and HCR) Project Proposals*. 285.

<https://louis.uah.edu/rceu-proposals/285>

This Proposal is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Summer Community of Scholars (RCEU and HCR) Project Proposals by an authorized administrator of LOUIS.

**Faculty Researcher/Mentor Information:**

Diana Calhoun Bell, Doctor of Arts in Rhetoric and Communication.

Associate Professor in Communication Arts.

Email: [diana.bell@uah.edu](mailto:diana.bell@uah.edu) Office: 243 Morton Hall; Cell Phone 256-701-7101

**Project Summary:**

This study will analyze the relatively new phenomenon of traditional news outlets reporting on content from social media through a qualitative content analysis of social media tweets discussion threads as covered by traditional media outlets.

**Project Discussion:**

The promise and premise of Web 2.0 is the dynamism generated by user-created content. Through the use of social media, the user is no longer a passive consumer of information, but an active contributor to social dialogues. When Twitter went public as a company in 2013, the documents filed with the SEC said that they had more than 200 million monthly active users and that these users combined tweet more than 500 million times a day. While social media can be a valuable tool for social engagement and performance of identity, to the researcher it can be an analytical artifact that documents and contextualizes historical culture. The bulk of the relevant literature on social media research deals with its users and content, rather than on the platform itself. Marshall McLuhan's 1964 *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* said famously "The medium is the message". When applied to social media, we consider how social media is changing our society through these tools of integration and separation, we consider the way social discourse is presented, and how social media frames the message to favor certain arguments over others, we consider how the broadening of audience base can affect public policy and social culture, we ask *What has social media done to us?*

A study is proposed to analyze the relatively new phenomenon of traditional news outlets reporting on content from social media. Many news outlets now carry stories about what is "trending" on Twitter and on what is said by famous public figures on social media. Before the advent of "Web 2.0" and social media, traditional news media dominated the role of framing of social debates.

Traditional

news outlets relied on polls and “man-on-the-street” interviews as measurements of public opinion. With social media, it is now possible for mass participation in social and other policy debates. Because of its wide audience, social media has become the dominant force in framing social debates. A content analysis project of Tweets of social discussions covered by traditional media is proposed. By studying social media through the lens of journalistic discipline, we will discover how social media differs from traditional media and how traditional media has adapted, through the principle of audience-driven relevance, to a social media community. A secondary-level of content analysis will be conducted on the body of tweets identified by hashtags specifically mentioned in the traditional media stories. We will analyze the rhetorical or other content differences within the tweets to understand what is reported on and what gets left out of news stories. Tweet “value” based on reply, retweet, and favorite will be measured to see if it has any correlation to news content. Finally, high-value tweets will be analyzed rhetorically and categorized according to logos, pathos, and ethos to determine if there are differences in traditional news media coverage of the social discussion.

**Student Expectations:**

Through this project the student will gain an intimate understanding of news values and content regulation. Through the comparative study, the student will learn how journalists might frame sensitive and controversial topics in the context of journalism guidelines while catering to audience and cultural relevant needs. From a social media perspective, the student will learn and contribute to the understanding of how to write for social media, specifically how do people create popular content and what sort of rhetorical devices are effective to the audience. Finally the student will develop a critical view of social media versus traditional media perspectives, a valuable and flexible insight for any media-related discipline, whether it’s PR, advertising, or journalism.

**Student Requirements:**

Students must be of junior or senior status in Communication Arts, English, Psychology, Sociology or Political Science have successfully completed courses in writing, communication, journalism, and social media.

**Supervision:**

Dr. Bell will supervise this project through participating daily on the project’s Google Drive and meeting once a week with the student in order to evaluate progress, discuss literature review, and analyze data.

The supervisor will provide written and verbal feedback throughout the project. Ideally, the project will result in a published article in a peer reviewed communication research journal and a presentation at a national conference.