Title: Across the Great Divide: Gender, Twitter and Election in the United Kingdom and New Zealand

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Abstract

Politicians' use of Twitter has been well documented over the past decade but few studies have incorporated an explicitly comparative dimension. To explore how political and social context impacts upon tweet content, we analysed the substance and tone of 400 tweets from women MPs during the United Kingdom 2015 and New Zealand 2014 general election campaigns. Across our study, web links, visuals, and references to own campaign were common, though with some notable inter-party differences. A neutral tone prevailed, with positivity more present than negativity. NZ women MPs, particularly from the centre-right, demonstrated a broadcast and highly managed approach to Twitter. UK MPs were more interactive with both citizens and other MPs, shared more personal content, and largely ignored the media agenda. These comparative findings at least partly map onto the concentrated and diffuse personalisation approaches within the equalisation versus normalisation framework of social media. We conclude that region, party, and culture all play a role in the Twitter story, and are deserving of further scrutiny from political communication scholars.

Keywords

Twitter, women politicians, gender, comparative research, equalisation versus normalisation

Social media platform Twitter launched in 2006, with politicians among the early adopters of the micro-blogging technology, particularly in Europe and the United States (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff & van't Haar, 2013; Hawthorne, Houston & McKinney, 2013; Vergeer, 2015). Around the developed world, Twitter is now a firmly entrenched tool in the permanent campaign that characterises much of contemporary politics (Elmer, Langlois & McKelvey, 2012). However, despite or perhaps because political and social context is such an important determinant of Twitter use, there are surprisingly few comparative studies examining politicians' Twitter behaviour in different geographic settings (see Graham, Jackson & Broersma, 2016 for a useful exception) or which explore

the discursive and emotional aspects of tweet content, and almost none which compare the behaviour of particular political demographics (in our case, women politicians) in different regions. Many studies look at patterns and trends in politicians' tweeting behaviour but mostly do very little in terms of disaggregating data by gender, so women's voices can be obscured: focusing specifically on women makes an important contribution to the literature by un-silencing them.

Comparing the Twitter behaviour of women from two similarly structured but differently sized mature democracies with similar proportions of women MPs and common patterns of gendered media coverage (e.g. Macharia, 2015) allows us to test assumptions about women's communication practices and how these are manifest in social media while foregrounding party and nation. Our study aims to contribute something new to the debate by focusing on women MPs' tweets during the New Zealand (NZ, 2014) and United Kingdom (UK, 2015) general elections, exploring the salience of region and party on behaviour by taking an explicitly comparative approach to address questions around normalisation and equalisation. Despite early optimism that new social media platforms would level the political playing field for smaller parties and under-represented groups, research mostly supports a reinforcing of the status quo rather than subversion of established power distributions (e.g., Graham et al., 2013; Jungherr, 2016; Magin, Podschuweit, Haßler & Russman, 2016; Rauchfleisch & Metag, 2016; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013), at least in Western democracies.

Social media, politics, and election campaigns

After nearly a decade of research into Twitter and politics, diverse interests and methods have emerged though the field is yet to solidify around an established body of literature. In the first systematic review of research about Twitter and politics, Jungherr (2016, p.74) concluded that patterns in adoption and use are "surprisingly congruent across various countries and election cycles". Twitter tends to be used more by Opposition MPs, those in established parties, incumbents, and younger and more urban politicians. Jacobs and Spierings' (2016) in-depth exploration of the equalisation versus normalisation framework in the Netherlands connects the current ascendancy of

normalisation in the literature to technological diffusion and the subsequent loss of advantage by early adopters. Drawing from other European studies, they concluded that equalisation, when it happens, is minimal and rare, and that "…social media will mainly benefit a select group of more professional and motivated candidates who know how to exploit the opportunities offered by social media" (p.124).

The extent of internal strategic coordination within parties varies but Twitter is predominantly employed to share information on campaign activities and party news, and link to politicians' own websites (Jungherr, 2016; see also Graham et al., 2013; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Vergeer, 2015) – a pattern of mostly one-way communication summarised as "broadcasting" style. Despite an overall congruence of findings, important differences have also been documented, particularly between the US and other countries (e.g., Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Magin et al., 2016). While "Twitter use" is often described generically by researchers, Bruns and Moe (2013) point out that information exchange and interaction occur across three layers: meso, for the typical follower-followee communication; macro, for hashtagged communication; and micro, for interpersonal responses. Conventional politician-journalist relationships are often replicated in social media, and traditional media events such as televised leaders' debates drive Twitter traffic (Bruns, 2017; Comrie & Fountaine, 2016; Graham et al., 2013; Jungherr, 2016; Magin et al., 2016). The interaction that does occur tends to fall short of genuine 'public sphere'-style debate: opinions are easily shared on social media including Twitter but the quality is mixed, behaviour is not always civil, and populism appears to thrive (Magin et al., 2016; Sørensen, 2016; Vergeer, 2015).

Informed by these empirical findings about Twitter use across national settings, our content coding tool included questions about the structural content and topics of women politicians' tweets, including @mentions, links to various types of external content, and references to own and others' campaign activities.

Twitter, gender, and comparative research

The existing body of knowledge about women politicians and Twitter presents mixed findings. Jungherr's (2016) review of the literature up until 2014 concluded that there is no clear pattern in gendered adoption and use of Twitter, though US research in particular has not always distinguished between male and female candidates, or has been limited by women's absence from election campaigns (Jacobs & Speirings, 2016). More recent research supports the view that women politicians are heavier users of social media (e.g., Jacobs & Speirings) and more interactive than men (e.g., Meeks, 2016). In a wide-ranging US study, Evans and Clark (2016) found that gender had a direct and contextual effect on congressional candidates' Twitter activity and style: female candidates sent more attacking messages and discussed policy issues more than men, and this pattern became stronger in races with more female candidates. In studies linking content to voter response, the personalising affordances of Twitter were found to be less advantageous to female candidates in the US than males (Meeks, 2017). Questions about women politicians' tone and policy content on Twitter were also included in our analysis.

Jacobs and Speirings' (2016) work on intra party visibility for under-represented groups such as women and ethnic minorities is particularly relevant to explorations, such as ours, of women's patterns of Twitter use within and between parties. In fact, Jacobs and Speirings are among the few scholars who have closely studied the contributions of social media to equalising politics for women. In line with their overall conclusion that social media bring "equalization for some, normalization for most" (p.122), they argue that the early and later phases of social media diffusion deliver a degree of equalisation for women, who use social media more including to address gender equality issues but do not achieve the same levels of followers (including journalists) or send more tweets.

The specificity of individual country analysis can help isolate particular influences on tweeting, such as the deliberate focus on Switzerland by Rauchfleisch and Metag (2016, p.2414) as a "least likely critical case". However, more comparative studies are needed to help test "the assumption…that

the new personalized political culture that has emerged is largely uniform across different mature democracies" (Stanyer, 2008, p.416). As Vergeer and Hermans concluded, there are "good reasons to assume that the process of normalization and equalization may be dependent on institutional factors…because these institutional factors are conceptualized at the country level" (2013, p.415).

This point is especially pertinent for gender researchers, given social media are embedded in the (gendered) power structures and contradictions of the societies in which they operate (Fuchs, 2014). Bruns and Moe conclude that ultimately, "communicative processes on Twitter also provide us with a glimpse of far more fundamental aspects of human communication" (2013, p.27), suggesting gendered patterns in the broader communicative environment are highly likely to be reproduced in this space. Twitter risks being (or becoming) a gendered domain which constrains women's participation in public life in the same way as the mainstream media, but analyses which focus explicitly on women's Twitter discourse can provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between gender, politics, and social media and may even provide some cautious grounds for optimism. We therefore address two research questions:

- How salient are gender, party and cultural factors in shaping women politicians' Twitter narratives during a general election campaign?
- How do these patterns contribute to our understanding of social media as equalising or normalising the political playing field for women politicians?

Method

We had previously noted similarities in the ways in which NZ and UK women politicians are framed by the media and wanted to explore the extent to which such patterns could also be detected in women politicians' own communication strategies. We used content analysis to examine 400 tweets, evenly split between NZ and UK women MPs from the party of government and those from the main opposition party. We selected these 400 tweets from a much larger corpus which

comprised all tweets from the most active and "followed" politician tweeters (women and men) in our two countries (the top 40 in the UK and the top 20 in New Zealand) across all parties, determined in advance by checking Twitter activity one month before official campaigning began), sent during the election campaign periods of August 20-September 19, 2014 in NZ and March 30 to May 6, 2015 in UK.

From this larger corpus, we identified the top women tweeters from the two main parties in NZ and UK: in both cases, the party of government and main opposition party. We decided to only focus on the two main parties in order to be able to make credible comparisons between nation and party and thus avoid the potential bias of smaller-party variables. To make our comparisons meaningful, given differences in the number and activity levels of women politicians in the two countries, we established a baseline from the NZ corpus (where only five Labour women and four National women were sufficiently active on Twitter to produce a sizeable enough sample) and matched tweets from UK politicians in the same ratios, using a combination of constructed and random selection methods. We set this baseline for each group at 100 tweets. Given our larger corpus contained a total of just 121 tweets from National women during the 2014 election campaign, this was a substantial proportion of the available population of National tweets, and a conveniently round number for an exploratory comparative analysis.

As National women MPs were by far the least active group on Twitter during the campaign, we used a constructed sample for this group, comprising **every** tweet sent by Bennett, Collins, and Parata (National's three highest ranked female Cabinet ministers) during the campaign and a random selection of 45 tweets (from a total of 66) sent by mid-tier minister but more active tweeter, Niki Kaye. This approach maximised our range within National tweets, while helping to balance the influence of Kaye on party findings. To "match" National, we randomly drew 100 tweets from four randomly chosen Conservative UK women in the UK corpus.

In keeping with their party's greater emphasis on Twitter communication, Labour women in NZ used Twitter more consistently and frequently. Each MP sent a total of at least 21 tweets during the official campaign period, so twenty tweets from each woman were chosen at random for coding. This was matched with 20 tweets randomly chosen from each of the five most active and followed Labour UK women MPs all of whom were backbenchers. Table 1 shows the breakdown of tweets we analysed by party and country and includes follower numbers as captured at the start of campaigning.

[Table 1 about here]

Although our study is based on a modest and non-representative group of women politicians and a relatively small number of tweets, it is important to emphasise that our analysis uses, as its starting point, many if not all of the tweets sent by active and well followed National women politicians during the 2014 campaign. Studies of marginalised political groups (such as women MPs), particularly in small countries, will necessarily mean quantitatively small samples and we set out the findings below as an exploratory first step in modelling comparisons between women politicians' Twitter behaviour, in order to explore the influence of party and nation.

Guided by other studies of politicians' Twitter behaviours (e.g., Evans & Clark, 2016; Jungherr, 2016; Meeks, 2016), tweets were coded for type, content, tone, and levels of interactivity measured by the use of @mentions. The content analysis was supplemented by a close reading of illustrative examples, to provide depth and richness to the overall findings.

Findings

Structural content of tweets

Table 2 shows the structural content of tweets sent by our MPs. Comment-only tweets were by far the single largest category for UK MPs, Conservatives especially, and NZ Labour, with comment plus

photo or video consistently in the minority. Unsurprisingly given the networked nature of Twitter, messages containing web links were common, especially among National MPs where 63% of their tweets contained web links compared to just 11% of those sent by UK Conservatives. An obvious difference between the nations is the use of tweets containing both a photo and weblink which was popular among the NZ MPs, especially National, but not with UK MPs.

[Table 2 about here]

Perhaps more interesting is the broader pattern that emerges here. The National government MPs were both much *more* likely to send web links and much *less* likely to make comments alone. As incumbents in the popular government, these senior MPs (with Cabinet responsibilities) arguably had little to gain by informal commenting via Twitter, and instead made good use of links to the 'Beehive' (i.e. government) website and their party website to distribute policy announcements and information. This is a markedly different approach to that used by the incumbent government MPs in the UK, where the backbench Conservative MPs made very little use of web links and were the group most likely to send comment-only tweets.

Weblinks

For all MPs except UK Conservatives, between 25% and 33% of links were to MPs' own pictures, usually of themselves or their supporters campaigning and/or attending events. The high use of visuals suggests users in both countries recognise the value of pictures for increasing sharing and engagement online, and is consistent with other studies documenting politicians' emphasis on sharing images (e.g., Magin et al., 2016). There were no discernible patterns in the UK content, apart from the infrequency of Conservative women's linking behaviour, but Labour women were significantly more likely to multipurpose their tweets by linking to their other social media accounts: Stella Creasy tracked back to previous tweets and to her Instagram account and Sarah Champion also tracked back to previous tweets, especially where she had received a favourable mention. On

the Conservative side, Nadine Dorries was inclined to link to her own blog and Thérèse Coffey linked to a Party Election Broadcast on YouTube.

The NZ pattern was different between parties with National's wider social media strategy (Beveridge, 2016; Joyce, 2015) possibly explaining the number of Facebook links sent out via Twitter, particularly by Nikki Kaye, the reliance on their own pictorial material (almost entirely from the campaign trail with the occasional picture of, for instance, Kaye's grandmother's cat), and the use of official government websites. As in the UK, one NZ Labour MP (Jacinda Ardern) consistently linked to Instagram whereas none of the National women linked to any personal or fun sites but *did* link to themselves and their own party leader in the news.

The UK tweets included a small number of links to general news stories, including election news and stories in which they personally featured, whereas the NZ MPs linked to several types of news, with National MPs again tending to focus on endorsement-style links and Labour MPs more interested in media commentary about the government.

Finally, there is limited evidence here of links being used to expand political discourse beyond party and election political sources, a pattern which again emerges for NZ in the findings around the use of @mentions.

@mentions

UK politicians used @mentions in a clear majority of their tweets (68% Labour; 70% Conservative) in marked contrast to their NZ counterparts (12% Labour; 21% National). Of note is the inverse relationship between @mentions and hashtag use: Labour MPs in NZ were both the least likely to use @mentions and the most likely to use hashtags, reflecting their active tweeting around televised leaders' debates. In marked contrast, Conservative MPs were the most likely to use @mentions and the least likely to use hashtags. These findings reinforce the already noted pattern of UK women

being more interactive, actively and deliberately moving their communication with followers from "the default meso layer to the more intimate micro layer" (Bruns & Moe, 2013, p.21).

A deeper exploration of @mentions reinforces National MPs' centralised or managed use of Twitter, so that @mentions used by National women were mostly to colleagues, other parts of the party machine such as @youngNats, and to the media, indicating a relatively insular network with a focus on public messaging arguably directed at existing supporters. The generally less managed aspect of Labour tweets, particularly compared to National, was apparent in their use of @mentions: just three were to named Labour colleagues and two to the party – but a further two were to PM John Key and the remaining six were spread across media or were one-off uses. In effect then, NZ Labour's few @mentions (by far the lowest) were neither particularly diverse nor 'on-message'. This (negative) focus on the PM is also noted in the results on tweet tone below.

Among the UK politicians, there were examples of both the obviously strategic and wider range uses of @mentions. Most @mentions related to either individual citizens or to other MPs. In relation to citizens, the use of @mentions indicated a high degree of interactivity, for example: "@[redacted] the website statement means queries can't be submitted via that site. My election email is teresa@teresapearce.co.uk" (Theresa Pearce, Labour); "@[redacted] hello- sorry that you feel like that? Is there any reason?" (Stella Creasy, Labour); and "@[redacted] will do. Sorry for all the worry this is causing everyone; especially since there are designated sites already" (Charlotte Leslie, Conservative). Again, in contrast to NZ, the Labour and Conservative party leaders were rarely name-checked with only three appearances for each of David Cameron and Ed Miliband, the former mentioned twice by Conservative MPs and once by Labour, and Miliband seeing the opposite pattern. This reinforces the more diverse nature of UK women politicians' Twitter use, rarely following a party line nor reflecting the horserace coverage represented in mainstream media.

Topic content

Data about the topics of MPs' tweets were also analysed, and here, there were clear similarities across countries, at least in terms of primary focus. The UK politicians tweeted on between 16 (Labour) and 19 topics (Conservative) with the most popular topics identified in Table 3. It is clear that 'reference to own campaign' was the largest single topic across the women we studied, though of note (and consistent with our other findings) is National MPs referencing their own campaign more than twice as often as any other group. The diverse nature of UK MPs' tweets is indicated by the high number of miscellaneous topics with fewer than five mentions.

[Table 3 about here]

While reference to own campaign was the most common topic, the extent of this use varied and was strongest in NZ. References to campaigning often came across as a 'busy-busy' framing, particularly in Nikki Kaye's feed which provided regular updates on her electorate door knocking progress, but also in the UK, e.g., "Great campaign meeting with troops in Shefford tonight. Planning where and when we can help out in marginal seats also. Bring it on #GE2015" (Nadine Dorries, Conservative). UK politicians were much more likely than their NZ counterparts to use Twitter to express thanks, reflecting their more individualised interactions generally. As with patterns of @mentions, very few tweets by UK politicians focused on own party leaders or the primary election campaign topics of health or immigration, which shows a marked contrast with the mainstream news media agenda for whom those topics were significant. However, Rachel Reeves (Labour) managed to include the National Health Service (NHS), a jibe against David Cameron, and support for her party leader in this tweet, a good example of a judicious use of 140 characters: ''You broke your bond of trust' with Britain people on the NHS @Ed_Miliband tells David Cameron. #leadersdebate.'' Conservatives sent more tweets featuring comments about GE2015 and social media abuse whereas Labour were much more likely to be critical about Government policy and supportive of colleagues' campaigning.

In NZ, National's tweets fell into 17 categories and were much more likely to express support for a policy issue, e.g., "30,000 fewer children in benefit-dependent homes compared to 2 yrs ago. National's plan will see thousands more raised in working homes" (Paula Bennett), mirroring the pattern for UK Labour, although Labour's policy mentions were nearly all in the opposite direction, i.e., accusatory against Government. National politicians' clear focus on their own (and their party's) campaigns far outweighed references to personal, fun, or social topics but surprisingly, they also managed more of the latter than any other single group we studied. More Labour tweets involved criticism of other parties or fell into the additional category created to reflect Clare Curran's interest in global surveillance (all ten tweets about spying were sent by Curran). NZ MPs also commented on media stories much more than their UK counterparts although Labour were twice as likely as National to mention a media-related topic and to be critical of government, e.g., "Voting starts today but Nats won't 'show us the money' till next week. Keep them in the dark and feed them animal manure comes to mind" (Annette King). Of note, Labour women were almost as interested in their rivals (particularly PM John Key) as they were in promoting their own campaign activities and were much less likely to talk about their own campaign or party leader. While two National tweets contained specific criticism about Labour policies, 13 Labour tweets did this in the opposite direction. To some extent, this is not surprising since attack campaigning is much more likely to be advanced by parties in opposition than in Government but the scale of the difference is stark.

Tone

As well as coding for broad tonal sentiment (positive, negative, mixed, neutral) and identifying the targets of particularly emotional tweets, we were also interested to better understand how women politicians employ emotional language and their choice of words when they have full control over their messaging and every symbol counts. Much work on social media suggests that users will often employ crude language, including expletives, but this was rare in our study, although a few tweets included asterisks, e.g., "s**t". Here we concentrate our analysis on the non-neutral tweets,

enabling connection to themes in the literature around women politicians (e.g. Meeks, 2016; 2017) and providing richer material for comparative analysis across parties and countries.

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4 shows the breakdown of tone and target across the parties and countries. Nearly half of all tweets were neutral (171 out of 400; 43%), followed by positive (31%), negative (20%), and mixed (6%). We determined tone by looking for words which connoted some kind of emotion: the positive emotions were mostly associated with appreciation (e.g., thanking people) or satisfaction with a good campaign event, e.g., "I've got some amazing volunteers and the support on the doorstep is fantastic!" (Sarah Champion, Labour, UK); "So grateful to all our Auckland Central volunteers who have been sorting more than 20,000 letters to be hand-delivered" (Nikki Kaye, National, NZ). For tweets coded as 'negative', the sentiments expressed were broadly categorised as sarcasm, anger, or disdain. One of the very rare examples of colourful language was offered by Annette King (Labour, NZ) in a direct attack on an opinion poll carried out by public broadcaster, TVNZ: "What a load of cobblers! TVNZ poll. About as useful as their decision to put political parties opening broadcasts on at same time as rugby!" Stella Creasy's plea to young people to remain committed to UK Labour after they lost the election was a good example of a politician showing empathy and understanding: "To generation of upset young labour campaigners tweeting heartbreak - we were you in 1992. We can renew our movement so keep faith! #labour".

Negative tweets comprised one-fifth of all tweets and we consider some of them below. They serve as useful reminders of how politicians' voices can sound when unfettered by the protocols of polite discourse more commonly associated with formal political communication. A tweet from Helen Goodman (Labour, UK) was direct in its accusation of unfair practices and references a key trope in this election and many others, which is that Conservative policy routinely disadvantages the already disadvantaged: "Tory manifesto philosophy really is to those who have shall it be given and to those who have not shall it be taken away."

Stella Creasy (Labour, UK) provides a useful example of 'angry' (included amongst the category of 'hostile') tweets, of which there were relatively few. Where they did appear, they were nearly always directed at a person rather than a policy: "@[redacted] @[redacted] don't want her to define what matters and angry she is given space to do so as generates column inches." Although we don't know to whom the 'her' refers as we didn't capture the entire conversation, Creasy's sentiment is clear. On the other hand, Creasy was quick to be supportive when she heard of someone who has been criticised for their views, most likely one of her constituents given her response: "@[redacted] sorry to see that - you have a right to express your political views without such harassment! Will do solidarity visit…;-)."

On the Conservative side, politicians appeared equally keen to challenge followers, but were more likely to direct their comments at individuals rather than policies, as with this example from Therese Coffey (Conservative, UK): "@labourlewis neither erroneous nor misleading. Agree Lab fully entitled to withdraw from integration but don't then say that's what we need." The Twitter handle of the person to whom Coffey is responding suggests she is being tweeted to by a Labour supporter (it was in fact a male opposition MP), so her response is remarkably measured given the provocation of words such as 'erroneous' and 'misleading' which were presumably part of the original tweet to her. Whilst all politicians will be followed by supporters and politicians of other parties in order to bait, engage, or enrage, this is one of very few examples in our study of politicians on competing sides 'debating' each other on Twitter. A rather different way of representing emotion, Paula Bennett (National, NZ) tweeted a response from a supporter: "Text recvd today 'Paula u have my vote. Please stop sending me s**t'". As there is no further comment from Bennett, her followers are expected to draw their own conclusions about Bennett's purpose in making this tweet, perhaps to indicate her sense of humour, surprise, or the contradictory nature of political support.

What Table 4 obscures is that some women were more likely to be positive or negative than others. For example, Labour NZ's Annette King sent one supportive tweet about her party leader and one

about her party, but eight negative tweets about the PM (calling him, amongst other things, the money trader, and mocking his propensity to talk about his state house childhood) and one negative tweet about National party policy. Other NZ Labour MPs such as Clare Curran and Sue Moroney also tended towards negativity, going against their party's rhetorical insistence on 'vote positive' messaging and themes. In the UK, seven of the 12 tweets by Conservative MPs which expressed negativity towards another person were made by Nadine Dorries, five of which related to online abuse. Of the 27 negative tweets about policy made by Labour women, 15 were from Helen Goodman and seven from Rachel Reeves, the former comprising a concerted Twitter campaign by Goodman against the bedroom tax. However, in marked contrast to her NZ Labour colleagues, Jacinda Ardern ran an upbeat Twitter campaign albeit one that did not appear closely connected to the party. Similarly, National's Nikki Kaye used a people-centred approach when supporting her colleagues in their various 'great!' policy announcements, as well as writing various supportive tweets about "beautiful" Waiheke Island, her grandmother's "beautiful cat", and the "gorgeous" children she met on the campaign trail. Interestingly, Kaye was also the most followed National MP, suggesting appreciation of her positive tone.

While politicians tweeted negative content about the policies of their political foes, several of the 'angry' tweets related to online abuse: three UK women (two Labour, one Conservative) tweeted about their own or other women's experience of harassment, often asking their harassers to stop and including their Twitter handle. These two low-key requests made by Stella Creasy (Labour) are considerably restrained given she was the subject of sustained Twitter abuse which resulted, in one case, with the perpetrator being arrested and sent to prison: "@[redacted] Um- please stop. thanks. and maybe - get help? #clickburr"; "@[redacted] Only please stop copying me into your emails and tweets. Thank you." A more robust response is made by Sarah Champion (Labour) although the last part of the tweet implies that perhaps Champion knows her accuser, "And what else did I say in that tweet? Don't try to contort the truth, it's beneath you." Nadine Dorries (Conservative) tweeted about third party harassment, annexing herself to the role of victim in this tweet: "Former grp editor

@bedfordnews called my stalker warned 2stop harassing journos bcse they wldnt write what he told them to about me #NSAW2015." Five out of the twenty tweets we captured for Dorries were about the harassment she had personally experienced or that perpetrated against other women.

Discussion

The results from this exploratory study suggest that there are interesting similarities and differences between and among the women politicians in our study, with region, party and culture all playing a part in the Twitter story. One major finding is that the political Twittersphere is much less broadcast-style and media-centric in the UK than NZ. While the UK MPs did refer to their own campaign activities, such mentions were far less frequent than among the NZ MPs and they were much less in thrall to the mainstream news media's agenda and the concomitant fascination with the election horserace. These findings contrast with claims that journalists are an important secondary audience for politicians' social media (e.g., Magin et al., 2016) and possibly reflect a deliberate distancing by UK politicians from the mainstream media in the wake of reputational issues highlighted by the Leveson Inquiry. In addition, while there were a few references to leaders' debates and some sharing of news links, UK MPs' tweets were much more personalised in terms of their interactions with the public and broader tweet content, including some angry messaging aimed at Twitter trolls. Our study suggests UK women politicians are embracing the potential for authenticity, interacting with followers, sharing light-hearted content, tweeting on a wider range of topics, and promoting a more 'candidate centred' campaign strategy than was apparent among NZ politicians.

On the other hand, NZ politicians demonstrably did keep close track of mainstream media, commenting on stories and name-checking journalists and commentators, arguably as a strategy to strengthen the impact of their tweets and to leverage the media as both ally and objective referee. This focus on news media amongst the NZ women is interesting and suggests a more integrated media management system operating in NZ politics, a finding supported by other insights into party

strategy (e.g., Beveridge, 2016; Joyce, 2015). In addition, most NZ MPs (from National in particular) used Twitter to promote their own campaign activities, made relatively little use of web links which pointed beyond the political and mainstream media spheres, and employed a narrow range of @mentions. In combination, these findings emphasise the broadcast style of NZ women politicians on social media and support the notion that the Australasian Twittersphere is an insular circuit rather than an inclusive tool for widening political discourse (Comrie & Fountaine, 2016; Lukamto & Carson, 2016).

Our second but related key finding goes to the heart of tension between Twitter's promotional and democratic potential, exacerbated by the wider move towards personalisation in politics and the decline in support for political parties. The microblogging platform lends itself to both authentic engagement and managed messaging, and our comparative study captures some evidence of the role of context and party organisation in this breadth of Twitter use among women politicians. As indicated above, almost all links and hashtags from MPs in NZ's frontrunner party, National, were about themselves or their party. Tweets relied heavily on official campaign materials and publicity, with little interaction. While the Labour party was generally less strategic in its messaging, candidates clearly did follow a party line of tweeting around election debates. Conversely, UK MPs appeared to regard Twitter as a more personalised, if still political, mode of communication, exercising considerable autonomy in what and how they tweeted and seemingly liberated from the otherwise scrutinising radar of their party whips. Only Helen Goodman (Labour) made strategic use of Twitter's broadcast capability to send multiple near-identical tweets about the #bedroom tax, suggestive of a planned and targeted style.

Our comparative study thus provides evidence for Jacobs and Spierings' (2016) theorisation that the extent of centralisation and control in a party organisation, as well as "electoral tides" (p.111), influence broader patterns of political personalisation, with implications for equalisation and normalisation. Diffuse personalisation enables a party politician to build their following

unsupervised on Twitter; akin to equalisation, it was more apparent among the UK women we studied. Concentrated personalisation occurs where the focus is on the already powerful, resources are provided centrally, and lower ranked politicians are discouraged – or at least not supported – to engage in social media. This is akin to normalisation and was more apparent among our NZ women politicians, National in particular.

Interestingly, Bruns' (2017) work on Australia's 2013 general election suggests a similar scenario, where that country's conservative party – also election favourites – employed a "'small target' campaign that minimised risks by tightly controlling its candidates' mainstream and social media exposure" (p.52), relying on announcement-style tweets likely produced at campaign headquarters and with little in the way of @mentions or retweeting. In contrast, Australian Labor Party tweeting was carried out by mostly rank-and-file MPs and seemed designed to draw attention away from a party in a state of disarray.

Despite its apparent attractions, an on-message, party-centred approach to Twitter characterised by leader-based messaging and media endorsements overlooks the personalised opportunities which often draw politicians to social media in the first place (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). This normalisation of social media as a mainstream tool in political communication also serves to reinforce conventional power structures – a particular concern for women politicians given early optimism that social media offered an equaliser to their ongoing invisibility in the mainstream media (Walsh, 2015). For women politicians on both sides of the world, a context specific and nuanced strategy, based on the sort of close comparative analysis we offer here, is therefore important. For instance, while increased numbers of followers will eventually make it "practically impossible" (Vergeer, 2015, p.752) for politicians to interact with citizens in any meaningful way, politicians in NZ, with generally much smaller followings than their UK counterparts, currently seem to exploit very little of Twitter's potential for public engagement. If, as Karlsen and Enjolras (2016) suggest, the most successful politicians on Twitter focus on political topics but *interact* around these topics, UK politicians could

retain their interactivity but be more targeted in terms of topics, and NZ politicians could retain their political focus but introduce more interactivity. There are pros and cons to both strategies but perhaps politicians and strategists in both countries can learn from the approach of each other. Further research, with larger and more directly comparable samples of politicians, is needed to test this finding.

Conclusion

Our exploratory study is a reminder of the importance of social media research crossing geopolitical divides and including gendered readings of content, from both small and large democracies, to inform decisions about campaign strategising by groups looking to address their traditional political marginalisation. While we did not look beyond Twitter in this study, Karlsen and Enjolras (2016, p.352) suggest that "candidates who gain influence in social media are those who are able to create a synergy between traditional media channels and social media", so future work could explore the ways in which women incorporate Twitter and other social media tools into their broader campaign communications strategy. The considerable dissonance between mainstream media's agenda and our MPs' tweet topics (at least among the UK MPs) says something important about the ways in which they use social media as a personalised communication tool, using it to frame messages in their own way and, in line with equalisation possibilities, attempting to build their own personal Twitter networks. We acknowledge that the small-scale and non-representative nature of our study means that we are unwise to make broad generalisations and that larger and more directly comparable cross-country samples will be required to make stronger claims. However, we aimed to provide a snapshot of tweets from women MPs across two countries from the two major parties and to identify similarities and differences and we have done that here. Importantly, we have also taken an explicitly gendered approach, determined to acknowledge the influence of gender on patterns of political communication, and drilled down into tweet content to illuminate the comparative data. But there is so much more work to be done to explore the connections between gender, party,

nation, and audience, and the relative influence of each in determining the different styles – and successes – of the political Twitterati. We look forward to reading that work in the future.

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Table 1: Number of tweets from politicians in our study, by country and party (with follower numbers)

Labour NZ	National NZ	Labour UK	Conservative UK
Annette King 20 (3937)	Paula Bennett 23 (3108)	Helen Goodman 20 (6721)	Anne Milton 7 (6084)
Nanaia Mahuta 20 (853)	Judith Collins 20 (6736)	Teresa Pearce 20 (5799)	Charlotte Leslie 19 (7860)
Sue Moroney 20 (1998)	Hekia Parata 12 (4783)	Stella Creasy 20 (53,654)	Therese Coffey 35 (9288)
Jacinda Ardern 20 (18,311)	Niki Kaye 45 (10,051)	Sarah Champion 20 (9540)	Nadine Dorries 39 (27,290)
Claire Curran 20 (4600)		Rachel Reeves 20 (42,505)	
Total 100	Total 100	Total 100	Total 100

Table 2: Structural content of tweets, by country and party

	Labour NZ	National NZ	Labour UK	Conservative UK
Comment only	64	32	60	81
Comment plus weblink (*includes own email)	25	42	39	11
Comment plus photo	0	3	1	7
Comment plus weblink and photo	11	21	0	0
Comment plus video	0	2	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 3: Main and subsidiary tweet topics, by country and party

Labour NZ	National NZ	Labour UK	Conservative UK
Reference to own campaign (30)	Reference to own campaign (60)	Reference to own campaign (18)	Reference to own campaign (22)
Comment about a GE2014 news story (general) (30)	Comment about a GE2014 news story (general) (15)	Comment about policy issues (17)	Comment thanking someone or group (19)
Criticism about other parties (13)	Comment about policy issues (15)	Criticism about other parties (16)	Comment directed to a particular person (13)
Reference to other party leader (11)	Reference to own party's campaign (29)	Reference to a colleague MP's campaign (16)	Comment about something personal, fun or social (12)
Comment about something personal, fun or social (10); Spying/surveillance (10)	Comment about something personal, fun or social (15)	Comment thanking someone or group (12)	Comment about a GE2015 news story (7)
Miscellaneous (7)	Miscellaneous (8)	Miscellaneous (21)	Miscellaneous (27)
Total = 111	Total = 142	Total = 100	Total = 100

Note. Up to two topics were coded for each tweet.

Table 4: Tone of tweets, by country and party

	NZ Labour women	NZ National women	UK Labour women	UK Cons women	Total
Supportive/positive about a specific person	22	24	10	16	72
Supportive/positive about a policy	1	13	0	5	19
Positive support for others (i.e. general helpers, voters, own party)	5	11	10	8	34
Critical/negative about a person	20	2	6	12	40
Critical/negative about a policy/Government	4	0	27	0	31
Critical/negative about other (i.e. organisation, media)	4	2	0	4	10
Mixed	14	7	1	1	23
Neutral	30	41	46	54	171
Total	100	100	100	100	400