# Keeping the Gates on Twitter: Interactivity and Sourcing Habits

# of Lebanese Traditional Media

# *Dear Professor Gross,*

# *Kindly find below the authors’ comments to the reviewers’ feedback. All our answers are highlighted in yellow in the replies below. All revisions and additions are also marked by yellow highlights in the main document itself.*

# *Thank you,*

# *Authors*

# *August 23, 2020*

Reviewer A:

*Thank you for your detailed and extensive feedback. Your comments have significantly raised the quality of our paper. Please find below each comment our answers in italics and yellow highlights.*

Thanks to the editors of the International Journal of Communication (IJoC) for giving me the opportunity to review this interesting article entitled “Keeping the Gates on Twitter: Interactivity and Sourcing Habits of Lebanese Traditional Media.” The study analyzes the gatekeeping and sourcing practices of traditional Lebanese media on Twitter.

The main conclusion of the articles is that both Lebanese television and newspaper media continue to play their traditional role of gatekeepers even in the online-networked media ecosystem because a) they use these platforms as a marketing tool to promote their own content, b) interaction with audiences is very limited, and c) most of their sources come from officials.

Although the article is interesting, the manuscript in its current version falls short and needs several improvements and clarifications before being considered for publication in IJoC. Therefore, I would like to ask the authors to take into consideration the following suggestions:

A. Literature review

The theoretical framework is well written. Two of the main concepts of this study —gatekeeping and journalistic sourcing—are discussed widely and properly. However, it seems to me there is not a clear connection between the concept of Gakekeeping and some social media variables such as external links, hyperlinks, mentions, hashtags, retweets, etc. The authors argue they used Russell’s (2019) conceptualization of traditional gatekeeping and interactivity but there is not explanation in the lit review of how they operationalized gatekeeping.

Therefore, it’d be extremely helpful if you could please provide a theoretical framework that connects gatekeeping with those social media elements that are included in this study as measurements, but do not have enough explanation from the theory. I believe that by providing this framework, readers will be able to understand what to expect from those social media variables in the context of Gatekeeping and Twitter. The following articles may also shed light on those connections:

Lasorsa, D. L., Lewis, S. C., & Holton, A. E. (2012). Normalizing Twitter. Journalism Studies, 13(1), 19–36.

Lasorsa, D. (2012). Transparency and Other Journalistic Norms on Twitter. Journalism Studies, 13(3), 402–417. http://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.657909

The same problem seems to happen with questions related to visuals (RQ2a, RQ2b, RQ3), which do not have enough theoretical support neither from gatekeeping/sourcing point of view nor from previous research that shows differences between newspapers and TV broadcasting.

*This section is revised to clarify the theoretical frameworks in two places: on p. 9 (“Digital content… Singer, 2005”) and p. 11 (“Situating… on Twitter), in addition to relying on published research (Russell, 2019).*

*As for differences between newspaper and TV, the following paragraph has been added as a rationale on p. 10: “In addition to… Russell, 2019.”*

For instance, RQ2a asks “To what extent do Lebanese media tweets include visuals?” I wonder with regards to what.

*Since RQ2a is descriptive, the phrase ‘to what extent’ was meant to measure simple frequency of use. Taking into the reviewer’s comment, it is now rewritten for clarity: “how often do Lebanese media tweets include visuals?”*

RQ2b asks whether there is a difference between newspapers and TV stations in the use of visuals in their tweets? Is there previous research that explains this difference?

*To our knowledge, no such studies exist, however, we added a rationale for why we included this question in our study on p. 11: “Situating the… gatekeeping theory”.*

RQ3: To what extent do visuals attract retweets, comments, mentions, and hashtags? Is there previous research that explains these associations?

*Rationale was provided on p. 9 through 11.*

B. Method

I suggest the authors should provide a good explanation of how a sample of 1,300 tweets may be representative of 13 Lebanese media outlets (5 newspapers and 8 TV channels). From my perspective, the sample is too small to draw conclusions about all these Lebanese media as tweets represent in average 100 posts per media organization.

*Although we acknowledge how 1300 tweets do not ‘represent’ all Lebanese media, we do believe the selection procedure, which was free from bias and which focused on an uneventful period, could give us a snapshot of how these media behave. Broadly speaking, 1300 tweets is not a small sample, and the 100 tweets were chosen as a stratified sampling technique to ensure all the media, regardless of how often or rarely they tweet, are represented in the sample. We acknowledge in the limitations how such a method has its shortcomings and should be taken into consideration when making generalizations. We also reference Kilgo et al.’s (2018) study that randomly sampled 100 articles from tweets from each of the four media outlets they included in their study.”*

The authors said, at the end of page 11, that the intercoder reliability tests for 15 variables ranged from 0.79 to 1.0 in Krippendorff’s alpha. It’d benefit the method section of the paper if the authors provide the Krippendorff’s alpha for each one of the variables independently. *These are now available as a footnote.*

Also, please provide previous methodological support for the procedure you did replacing the outlier by the value 1.

*Citations were added on p. 14.*

I understand that you needed to collapse six source categories due to low frequency. However, I believe that calling the new category “individuals”—which compresses experts, entertainers, athletes, citizens, blogs, and other—is not the best option. Please name that category in a comprehensive way that truly reflects the rich composition of this new variable and can offer meaningful conclusions for your results.

*The naming was changed from ‘individuals’ to ‘professionals and citizens’*

Check the statistical test that explains the differences between newspapers and television stations regarding the nature of their links because one statistical assumption when conducting crosstab associations is that the count in each value should have a minimum of 5. The category “Others” in both cases (newspapers and TV) has a frequency of 1.

*This was an oversight on our part. We kept the original test because of the theoretical meaning of linking to one’s own site, but added a second chi-square test that uses a recoded hyperlinks variable to get rid of the low count in the cells (p. 16).*

Also, please double-check the chi-squares of that same test because X2 =10.08 and X2=15.56 seem to be small to obtain significant p values.

*We double-checked and, yes, they are both correct.*

C. Discussion

In general, the manuscript would make a more significant contribution to scholarship if it devoted part of the discussion section to reflecting on the implications of its findings for the theory and practice of digital journalism.

*The discussion and conclusion sections have been edited by deleting repetitions and adding new interpretations to highlight the theoretical contribution of the study.*

Additionally, in page 16, the authors said, “In the case of some outlets, however, Twitter only served as another platform they should be on but might not necessarily want to.” This is a strong assumption about Lebanese media that cannot be drawn from the data. The example about the state broadcaster Télé Liban whose tweets are linked to its Facebook page could be due to lack of resources or other factors.

*Sentences were revised to reflect the reviewer’s comment on p. 19: “This could… Lebanese state.”*

Please provide better discussion for the finding that “Media tend to include more hashtags when they use visuals.” What does it mean for the practice of journalism on social media and what is the theoretical connection between these two elements?

*Explanation was added on p. 20: “Perhaps… online media.”*

The authors concluded, page 18, that “In the absence of social recommendations from the Twittersphere, Lebanese media tweets stagnate, rarely reaching users on the platform.” This conclusion does not recognize the dramatic drop in Twitter traffic and the interaction difficulties that that social media platform imposes on media and journalists.

*These comments have been added to the discussion on p. 22 and 23: “Their problems… Brookes, 2016”.*

D. Other minor details:
Please provide citation for the following statements:

a. These changes have offered media consumers the choice to act as both sender and receiver of information (p. 6).

*Citation was added on p. 7: “Interactivity… (Sundar et al. 2012).*

b. The creation and consumption of content has meant members of the public can further amplify the reach of established media by sharing their content (p. 7).

*Sentence was replaced with the following on p. 7: “On the other hand… Shi et al., 2018).*

Finally, in page 16 the authors write “(...)which does not apply to some of the television channels in Lebanon that do not put have a strong online presence.” Please correct and use one verb.

*Corrected!*

Good luck.

Reviewer C:

*Thank you for your feedback. Please find below each comment the authors’ answers in italics and yellow highlights.*

Keeping the gates on twitter: Interactivity and sourcing habits of Lebanese traditional media

In her/his examination of the relationship between the use of sources and tweet popularity in the Lebanese media context the author presents a wealth of sources. The first part of the paper provides an enjoyable reading about the general subject. It also demonstrates the author’s good knowledge of media gate-keeping sources in Lebanon. Perhaps the literature review on gate-keeping and sourcing is the best part of the paper.

The trouble with the paper, as I perceive it, is in the results and conclusion sections. These sections present data with little or no explanation of the implication of the data within the Lebanese context.

The paper is descriptive and does not provide critical analysis of the data. One would expect an explanation of the results within Lebanon’s setting: what are the implications of the findings? How can the findings shed light on the adoption of policies or plans that may contribute to exposing the “troubling” media sources?

*The discussion and conclusion sections have been edited by deleting repetitions and adding new interpretations that focus on the practical and theoretical implications of the findings.*

Such an undertaking requires that the author supports the quantitative data with a rational analysis that includes a discussion of the biography of the Lebanese media (media structure, political and social environment (which the author acknowledges in page 19)

*A more detailed biography of Lebanese media is provided in the literature review on p. 5 and 6 (“The Lebanese media… Media use, 2017”) and also added in numerous places in the discussion.*

The paper includes unnecessary detailed, often repeated, description of the recording and coding process. It also presents the data in numerical (tabular) form then repeats the presentation verbally instead of explaining the implication of these numbers.

*Repetitions are discarded, keeping the numerical data in the tables, where applicable.*

Often, the author uses vague statements that are addressing a layperson more than a serious researcher.

*We believe simple academic writing could still be powerful and appeal to experienced researchers. However, we revised the sentences in a manner that keeps the language simple yet academic.*

An example would be the statements on the bottom of page 16: Concerning multimedia usage, Lebanese media seem to engage somehow well with visual content, including photos and videos in more than half of their tweets. These visuals, however, sometimes failed to attract the popularity they might had hoped for.

*Sentence was revised to be clearer and include citations to support the argument on p.19 and 20: “Concerning… practices.”*

And (on page 17): Lebanese media’s partisanship, reflected through their ideological leanings and partisan content (El-Richani, 2016), and evident in their reliance on political sources, did not provide them with the expected popularity.

*Sentence was revised and more information was added on p. 21: “Lebanese media… 2019.”*

This is an interesting and timely paper with good literature review but the resuklts and conclusion sections lack critical analyasis of the data.

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Reviewer D:

*Thank you for your feedback. Please find below each comment the authors’ answers in italics and yellow highlights.*

This is an excellent research. For the accessibility of the text I have the below minor revisions:

1.Rewrite the abstract:

The abstract should articulate the research question, its significance, methodology and important findings. This is just to make the text accessible and maintain the readers in check. Texts from the article can be used in the rewriting including page 3, Para. 2 and the last paragraph.

*Noted and revised.*

2. Keywords should include Lebanese news media and Twitter to better reflect the paper direction.

*Noted and revised.*

3. The discussion section could use some structure in titling and headlines.

*Subtitles are now added.*

4. Literature review could benefit from a few recent studies on the Lebanese press and broadcast.

*A few studies are now included on p. 5 and 6: “The Lebanese media… Media use, 2017”.*

5. Methodology could use a few more clarifications especially on newspaper selection and TV selection. Especially that not all TV stations are news stations. Excluding media sources from the study is as important to explain as the inclusion.

*We included all TV and newspaper outlets that have a Twitter account, excluding only Tele Lumiere, which is a purely religious channel that does not include news. All other media are news media.*

6. Shorten the conclusion and refocus it to reflect the main findings.

*Noted and revised.*

The conclusion should present the main interpretations of the findings rather than bring an overview of broader discussion.

*Noted and revised.*