The Whole Picture: Journalistic identity practices in words and images on Twitter

Kyser Lough | *Ph.D. Student* | *The University of Texas at Austin* | *@KyserL* | *KyserL@UTexas.edu*
Logan Molyneux, Ph.D. | *Temple University* | *@Loganex* | *Logan@Temple.edu*
Avery Holton, Ph.D. | *The University of Utah* | *@AveryHolton* | *AveryHolton@utah.edu*

Purpose

This study combines a visual content analysis of the images journalists use in their Twitter profiles with analyses of their profile text and tweets to examine how journalists represent themselves online with an eye toward individual and organizational branding.

Methods

Header Image
Appears only on the profile page itself. Wide and short dimensions accommodate great variety of imagery.
• Individual, personal
• Individual, professional
• News organization the person works for
• Journalism in general
• Related to beat
• Other/landscape/etc

Profile Photo
Appears alongside the user's name in every post. A major method of online visual presentation of self.
• Logo use (overlay or full)
• Person present
  - Eye contact
  - Smile
  - Cropping
  - Selfie
  - Clothing
  - Work action

Profile Text
References to:
- Journalist's employer
- Another journalist
- Another news organization
- A disclaimer
- Journalist's beat or coverage area
- Personal information
- Employer in Twitter handle

Tweets
Branding:
- **Individual** (reference to the journalist or his/her work)
- **Organizational** (a reference to the journalist's employer or a co-worker)
- **Institutional** (reference to another news organization, a journalist working at another news organization, or journalism in general)

Robbin Simmons
@RobbinSimmons7
Chicago-born mamma with 2 Miami-born kiddos. Emmy winner. @WSVN Anchor/Reporter. Grad of @uiowa & @MedillSchool IG:@RobbinSimmons7

Robbin Simmons @RobbinSimmons7 · 56m
driver in Miami accident now described as an "incoherent" clear if it is a parent. .@wsvn

Collection
• Cision database of U.S. journalists: 25,599
• Sampled 400 journalists proportionally by media type (final N = 381)
  - 58% Newspapers
  - 19% Television
  - 18% News websites
  - 5% Radio

Findings

Journalists choose a branding approach and apply it consistently across their profiles, with most profiles consisting of a professional headshot but notably lacking organizational identifiers such as logos. Journalists also tend to lean toward professional rather than personal images in their profile and header photos, indicating a possible predilection for professional identity over personal on social media.

RQ1: How do journalists visually represent themselves on Twitter?

66% had a header image

28% Landscapes

15% Beat

13% News Organization

13% Individual in professional context

98% had a profile photo

13% of all profile photos had logos

83% included people

Eye Contact **86%**
Smile **72%**
Professional Dress **67%**
Headshot **62%**
Selfie **15%**
Work Action **13%**

Logo in profile
More likely to have news organization or beat depicted in header image and less likely to have "other" (landscapes, etc) ($\chi2(7) = 26.34$, $p < .001$)
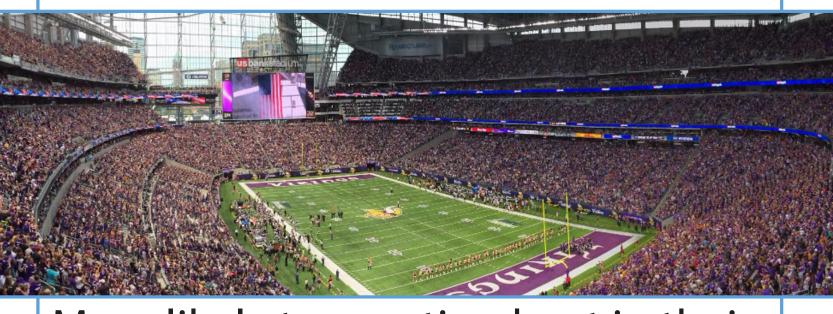
Professionally-dressed in profile
• Less likely to smile ($\chi2(1) = 4.01$, $p < .05$)
• Less likely to be a selfie ($\chi2(1) = 9.17$, $p < .01$)
• More likely to have a logo ($\chi2(1) = 4.08$, $p < .05$)
• More likely to work for news website (casually-dressed more likely to be newspaper or TV) ($\chi2(3) = 25.707$, $p < .001$)

RQ2: How do journalists' visual representations compare with their written representation?

Overall: Journalists were consistent across their profiles in leaning toward either personal or professional styles

Logo in profile
• More likely to reference employer's Twitter handle ($\chi2(1) = 22.97$, $p < .001$)
• Less likely to write personal information in their bio ($\chi2(1) = 25.464$, $p < .001$)

Depict beat in header image
More likely to mention beat in their written bio ($\chi2(7) = 23.32$, $p < .001$)

Professionally-dressed in profile
More likely to reference employer's Twitter handle ($\chi2(1) = 7.57$, $p < .01$)

Selfie
More likely to include personal info in their written bio ($\chi2(1) = 4.58$, $p < .05$)

RQ3: How do journalists' visual representations compare with their tweets?

Overall: Few connections. The way journalists tweet has almost nothing to do with how they represent themselves visually in their profiles. Only a few connections were found among journalists who send tweets containing elements of organizational branding (mentioning the news organization they work for or their co-workers there).

When tweets contained organizational branding
Less likely to be in the personal or "other" categories and more likely to depict their beat or their news organization ($\chi2(6) = 22.32$, $p < .001$)