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

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Purpose
This study combines a visual content analysis of the images journalists use in their Twitter profiles and 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

- **Profile Photo**
  - Appears alongside the user’s name in every post.
  - A major method of online visual presentation of self.
  - Logo use (overly or full)
  - Person present
  - Eye contact
  - Smiling
  - 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**
  - Individual (reference to the journalist or his/her work)
  - Organizational (reference to the journalist’s employer or a co-worker)
  - Institutional (reference to another news organization, a journalist working at another news organization, or organization in general)

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**
- **83% included people**
- **Eye Contact 86%**
- **Smile 72%**
- **Professional Dress 67%**
- **Headshot 62%**
- **Selfie 15%**
- **Work Action 13%**

### 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
- **Depict beat in header image**
  - More likely to have news organization or beat depicted in header image and less likely to have “other” (landscapes, etc) ($\chi^2(1) = 26.14, p < .001$)

### 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 ($\chi^2(2) = 22.32, p < .001$)