

Article:

Political News Journalists in Social Media: Transforming Political Reporters into Political Pundits?

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# POLITICAL NEWS JOURNALISTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

## Making everyone a political pundit?

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*Social media allow everyone to show off their personalities and to publically express opinions and engage in discussions on politicised matters, and as political news journalists engage in social media practices, one might ask if all political news journalists will finally end up as self-promoting political pundits. This study examines the way political news journalists use social media and how these practices might challenge journalistic norms relating to professional distance and neutrality. The study uses cluster analysis and detects five different user types among political news journalists: the sceptics, the networkers, the two-faced, the opiners and the sparks. The study's main finding is that there is a sharp divide between the way political reporters and political commentators use social media. Very few reporters are comfortable sharing political opinions or blurring the boundaries between the personal and the professional, indicating that traditional journalistic norms still stands in political news journalism.*

**KEYWORDS** cluster analysis; journalistic norms; journalism; Norway; political commentary; political news journalists; social media

### **Introduction**

These days, journalists are among the most enthusiastic users of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Fahri 2009; Hermida 2010), utilising them for everything from breaking news to self-promotion, political discussions, and sharing mundane details about their daily activities (Newman 2009; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton 2011). The “social” part of social media implies being personal and showing off one’s personality and often a melding of the personal and the professional (Podger 2009; Hermida 2010), and as journalists engage in social media practices, traditional journalistic values – like the professional distance that journalists have tended to uphold to audiences and sources, and norms related to neutrality and impartiality – are being challenged. A pressing question for journalists today, therefore, is whether they should participate in the messy mixture of personal and professional in social media, or if they should treat social media sites as simply another arena for publication and maintain the professional standards of journalism (Burgess and Bruns 2012).

Quite a few studies conducted over the past few years have looked into the way journalists engage in social media practices and the share of research on political news journalists is also extensive (see Esser, Strömbäck and de Vreese 2012 for an overview).

Nevertheless, the number of studies researching political news journalists' use of social media, is limited (a few exceptions are Singer 2005; and Verweij 2013. See Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser and Howes 2009; Holton and Lewis 2011; Cozma and Chen 2012; Lasorsa et al. 2011; Lasorsa 2012; Gulyas 2013; Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013; and Vis 2013 for research on other types of journalists). The professional standards of journalism might be particularly significant to political news journalists. First of all because political journalists have a very close and dependent relationship with one source group – politicians, and the fact that this relationship relies heavily on trust and professional integrity (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001; Fossum and Meyer 2010). Moreover, political commentary is a hallmark of political journalism, and journalists who comment and interpret politics might have a different approach towards both journalistic norms and social media use than journalists who work mainly as political news reporters. These factors make it particularly relevant to obtain comprehensive knowledge about this specific group of journalists' social media practices.

Many journalists today use social media to show off their personalities through humour and personal updates (Holton and Lewis 2011), and also to strategically present themselves to the public and build celebrity status (Sanderson 2008; Marwick and boyd 2011; Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013). In fact, social media's efficiency as marketing tools has been used to explain their overall popularity among journalists (Lasorsa et al. 2011). Social media also provide everyone with the opportunity to act as political commentators, and many political news journalists use their Facebook and Twitter profiles to express personal opinions and to engage in discussions on politicised issues (Podger 2009). It is not difficult to see that these practices might lead to a blurring of the boundaries between the professional and the private, and maybe also a melding of the roles of the political reporter and the political commentator in political news journalism. As the traditional journalistic norms of professional distance and neutrality are being challenged, are we entering a situation where all political news journalists come off as self-promoting political pundits?

The aim of this paper is to examine the way political news journalists engage in social media practices and also to assess whether these practices in fact do challenge journalistic norms. Several demographic and structural factors, and especially the division between political reporters and political commentators, might influence the way political news journalists make use of social media, and the study therefore uses cluster analysis to detect different social media user types. A survey which asked political news journalists about several aspects of their social media use make up the foundation for the analysis. The survey subjects were the members of the Norwegian Parliamentary Press Gallery (Stortingets Presselosje). Membership in the Press Gallery is granted to journalists in need of close contact with Norwegian MPs, and involves a range of privileges, from free access to the Parliament including the assembly room, the corridors and the café, without an appointment, as well as access to office spaces inside the Parliament, and also an invitation to the annual Christmas party hosted by the Press Gallery, where top politicians and other members of the social elite are invited (Allern 2001). This elite group of journalists, which has especially close ties to politicians, should constitute a good case in a study of political news journalists' social media habits.

The paper starts with a discussion of journalistic norms and values and continues with a literature review of previous research that has addressed the way social media might challenge these values, as well as how different structural and demographic factors might influence

journalists' social media practices. Research on political news journalists' social media practices is, as already noted, limited, so the literature review mostly focuses on research conducted on journalists in general. After a short presentation of operationalization and methodology, the results of the analysis are presented and the findings are also contrasted against former research on journalists' social media usage. The paper ends with a concluding discussion.

## **Journalistic Norms and Values**

### *The Ideal of "Objective Journalism"*

In democratic societies the news media are fulfilling two important functions. First, they inform the citizenry and function as an arena for deliberation and discourse by providing information on different issues and supplying various opinions. Second, they scrutinise those who govern by keeping power holders under surveillance and exposing misbehaviour (Asp 2007; Strömbäck 2003). In order to fulfil their basic functions, Asp (2007) argues, the news media must be 1) *informative* by providing citizens with information that enables them to form opinions autonomously on current issues; 2) *fair* by representing different opinions and not favouring one point at the expense of another; and 3) *scrutinising* by acting as "watchdogs" and alerting the public to misconduct amongst individuals in positions of power, so that citizens can form their own opinions and conclusions about their leaders' behaviour and character.

The journalistic ideals of *fairness* and *scrutinizing*, especially, are linked to values that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, when news media in the Western world achieved an increasing independence from political institutions and adopted professional ideals of objectivity, balance, and independence (Schudson 1978; Schudson 2001; Djerf-Pierre and Weibull 2008). The ideal of "objective journalism", however, has been the subject of much discussion over the last decades. Some scholars, for instance, have problematized the philosophical meaning of the notion and asked whether there really is an objective truth (see Strömbäck 2003; Deuze 2005). Yet in a more practical understanding of the concept, objectivity has been understood in the sense that journalism should be balanced and neutral, and a considerable amount of literature has argued that objectivity in this sense (often referred to by synonyms like impartiality, detachment, or non-partisanship) remains a cornerstone and an ideal to strive for in journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001; Brurås 2002; Donsbach and Patterson 2004; Singer 2005; Deuze 2005; Schudson and Anderson 2008; Kjendsli 2008).

On a day-to-day basis, neutral and balanced journalism implies that journalists should serve citizens first and maintain independence from those they cover (Brurås 2002; Kjendsli 2008). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) stress that if a journalist is affiliated with a particular side in a politicised matter, the journalistic task might get clouded, making it difficult to see things from other perspectives. Hence, journalists are often forbidden from participating in political activities such as contributing to political campaigns or participating in public rallies, and they are expected to keep their politics and personal opinions to themselves.

### *Political Commentary*

In an era with a growing supply of readily available information and disinformation, as well as competition from the blogosphere and social media, news organisations have upgraded the market value of interpretation and opinion making, and political commentary has been gaining importance as a journalistic genre. When today's political journalists look for an expert, that person is increasingly likely to be a colleague, and journalists now interview other journalists as all-around experts in political communication (Allern 2010). Many political commentators today are highly visible media figures and national celebrities, constituting a source of opinion formation and opinion articulation in the public sphere (Nimmo and Combs 1992; Enli 2009).

Political commentary has its base in the news media's function as scrutinisers of political power holders; political commentators act as representatives of the public vis-à-vis politicians and often operate from a critical stance, conveying an explicit distrust in political power holders. The genre, however, is also influenced by elements of tabloidization and popularisation. In their position as interpreters, journalists often explain the political reality in a popularised way with the use of dramatic visuals to capture and sustain the audience's attention and involvement (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull 2008).

Political commentators are not expected to uphold the traditional journalistic norms of balance and neutrality in the same way that political reporters are. The political value base of their evaluations is seldom expressed directly, but the commentators do interpret political news in a subjective way and through personal opinions. Some commentators even take on the role of judges or referees, delivering "verdicts" on political initiatives and performances (Allern 2010). Speculation has also been a key feature of political journalism in the 2000s. Political commentaries convey what politicians think and feel, disclosing their hidden motives and considerations, telling the audience how they will react and what will be the likely consequences (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull 2008).

### **Former Research**

As previously mentioned, research on political news journalists' social media use is limited, but a growing body of literature has addressed the way social media might challenge traditional journalistic norms, and how demographic factors might affect the way journalists engage in social media practices. In a much-cited article conducted before the advent of most social media platforms, Singer (2005) investigated US political news journalist bloggers and found that they often expressed opinions in their blogs, thus indicating a move away from the neutral stance of the traditional journalist. The majority of the bloggers in the study, however, were columnists already comfortable with incorporating opinion in what they wrote. Vis (2013) obtained similar results when studying journalist tweeters eight years later. She conducted a case study of two British reporters' Twitter coverage of the 2011 UK riots and found that they often included personal opinions in tweets, suggesting that we might see a watering down of the journalistic norm of neutrality and possibly a new hybrid norm on Twitter.

Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2011) have also studied journalist tweeters. They found that journalists tweeted about their daily work and their private lives and that they also engaged in

discussions and shared opinions, something they would not do if sticking to traditional professional norms. Moreover, the study found that journalists working for elite media (meaning larger, well-known news media) were less inclined to violate traditional journalistic. The researchers suggested that elite media journalists might have more vested in existing norms and have been more strongly socialised to accept them, while journalists working for less elite media perhaps feel the need to work harder to get the attention of others and thus engage more in the characteristic features of Twitter.

Holton and Lewis (2011) have studied the way journalists use humour in tweets, and found that this was closely related to other forms of engagement on Twitter; journalists tended to use humour while sharing personal opinions and engaging in discussions. The use of humour was also positively related to the journalists' general level of activity on Twitter, suggesting that journalists who become more accustomed to Twitter are more apt to adopt its milieu of informality, conversation, and humour. In line with Lasorsa et al. (2011), Holton and Lewis also found that journalists from less elite news media tended to use humour more frequently than elite journalists, supporting the explanation of less elite journalists as having more to win by adapting social media practices.

Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013, 10-12), in a novel study of Swedish journalists, found that the most active social media users saw themselves more as "scrutinizers of those in power" and "commentators on what is going on in society" than less active social media users. When controlling for gender, age, and education, however, the differences between active and less active journalists became insignificant, and the researchers thus concluded that there were no differences in journalistic professional ideals related to social media use. Still, the study did find that frequent social media users scored significantly higher on measures related to self-branding and that the frequent users were more inclined to accept blurring of boundaries between their professional and private lives. Furthermore, the study revealed that age and workplace were factors that had a significant effect on social media use. Younger journalists and journalists working online and in tabloids tended to be more active.

A novel study comparing British, German, Swedish, and Finnish journalists' social media practices (Gulyas 2013) also found the media sector to be vital for explaining social media use. Online journalists were the most avid users, whereas print journalists had the lowest levels of use. Likewise, the study found journalists in large media organisations to be more enthusiastic users than journalists in smaller organisations. The study also asked the journalists about their views concerning social media, revealing that a majority agreed that social media encourage opinion-oriented journalism. Even so, a majority of the journalists agreed that it was important to separate their professional and private social media use.

## **Method**

### *Selection and Operationalization*

This study is based on a survey of the members of the Norwegian Parliamentary Press Gallery – the elite of Norwegian political news journalists. In November 2012 the Press Gallery had 256 members, including journalists and editors from a wide range of media organisations,

from broadcasting to print media and regional to national media. To ensure that only relevant political news journalists were included in the sample, journalists who were retired or on leave, were excluded. However, I also contacted the political editors and asked if they had employees covering politics without being members of the Press Gallery. They provided me with a few additional names. Finally, a selection of 241 journalists received the questionnaire, which was distributed by e-mail and provided by a link through the feedback software Questback. Although both journalists and editors are included in the survey, they are all referred to as “political news journalists” throughout the study.

The fieldwork was conducted from November 2012 to January 2013, and the questionnaire asked the journalists about their social media practices and attitudes on several areas, from self-promoting and networking to views on opining, sharing and use of humour. Also, they were asked about frequency of use, such as time spent on different social media platforms, number of Facebook friends and Twitter followers, etc., and demographics like gender, age, education, workplace, and position. In its widest sense, the term social media refers to all web-based technology that allows users to create and share content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). In everyday language, however, the term refers mainly to social networking sites, and this article focuses on political news journalists’ use of Facebook and Twitter, the two dominating social media sites for political deliberation in the Western world today (Enjolras et al. 2013). The division between journalists who report and interpret politics is important in this study, but, journalists do not necessarily work solely as reporters or columnists, or editors for that matter. The position labels in this study, therefore, are not mutually exclusive; a journalist is categorised as a “reporter”, “columnist” or “editor”, if he or she has reported to hold this position on a daily or weekly basis.

A slight majority of the journalists in the sample, 135 out of 241 (56 per cent), answered the survey. This is pretty high, considering that the individuals who make up the sample are busy people. The study has a moderately sized N, but the 241 journalists in the initial sample constitute the whole population of relevant Press Gallery members, so a somewhat small N is inevitable when studying this particular group. The Press Gallery has more male members than female, and the members are also biased towards national media over regional media and print media over broadcast media. The group that responded to the survey is representative of the population on these critical variables. Nonetheless, a possible limitation in the data is that the 56 per cent that answered probably is more active in social media than the 44 per cent that did not respond. Only 3.7 per cent (N = 4) of the journalists reported not using social media at all, but the actual share of non-users is probably higher. The main aim of this study, however, is to detect different user types among the political news journalists, so the size of the various clusters is secondary.

### *K-Means Cluster Analysis*

The main method in this study is *k*-means cluster analysis, a multivariate method that aims to classify a sample of subjects on the basis of a set of measured variables into a number of different groups or clusters so that similar subjects are placed in the same group (Cornish 2007). Cluster analysis can be seen as analogous to factor analysis: Factor analysis groups variables into

factors; cluster analysis groups cases into clusters. *K*-means clustering is suitable when the number of variables is large and when the data set is moderately sized (Norusis 2013).

In *k*-means cluster analysis, the researcher decides the number of clusters that should be formed by the algorithm. The algorithm is called *k*-means, since a case is assigned to the cluster from which its distance to the cluster centre is shortest, and *k* is the number of clusters. In a data file with *N* cases, the algorithm starts out by searching through the cases from the top of the data file and then finds the *k* first cases with no missing data. These constitute *k* initial cluster centres. Next, the cluster means are computed again, using the cases that are assigned to the cluster and the cases are reclassified based on the new set of means. This iteration process is repeated until the cluster means don't change much between successive steps. Finally, the means of the clusters are once again calculated and the cases are assigned to their permanent clusters (Norusis 2013).

In *k*-means cluster analysis, all variables must be in the same unit scale. From a strictly statistical viewpoint, *k*-means cluster analysis should only be used on interval or ratio-scaled data as the procedure relies on Euclidean distances. However, the procedure is routinely used on ordinal data as well, even though there might be some distortions (Mooi and Sarstedt 2011). I included 17 variables and standardised all into five categorical variables at the ordinal level before running the analysis. The interpretation of the outcome shows that the results are meaningful and no distortion was found. *K*-means cluster analysis can be sensitive to the choice of initial clusters, and a good solution, therefore, is to repeat the analysis several times, asking for different numbers of clusters to see which produces the best results (Cornish 2007). I ran several analyses asking for two, three, four, five, and six clusters, and finally discovered that the five-cluster alternative detected the most dissimilar groups and the most interesting nuances in political news journalists' use of social media.

## Findings

### *Five Types of Social Media Users*

I have interpreted the results of the cluster analysis and named the five clusters of journalists as *the sceptics*, *the networkers*, *the two-faced*, *the opiners*, and *the sparks*. The findings are presented in table 1. The variables that contributed most to the formation of the clusters have been shaded grey, the darker the shade, the more important. As shown in the table, variables relating to opining and self-promotion contributed the most, indicating that the political news journalists' social media practices and attitudes vary mostly on these factors.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

*The Sceptics*. The largest cluster (*N* = 44) accounts for 34 per cent of the political news journalists, and I have named this group "the sceptics" because they are less keen or low social media users. They stand out with high scores on most of the variables, indicating negative attitudes. Out of all the clusters, the sceptics are the ones that are most reluctant to share, and they would never express political opinions or discuss politics in social media. Furthermore, they

are very sceptical towards self-branding; are the ones that are least likely to use social media for networking purposes; and do not at all find it important to be popular. Out of all clusters, they are also the ones that agree mostly with the statement that social media are best suited for entertainment purposes. The sceptics are not active Twitter users; 10 out of 44 don't even have a Twitter account, and those who do only tweet a few times a month or less on average. The sceptics are also the least likely to use social media for work-related purposes, 16 and 13 out of the 44 do not use their Facebook or Twitter accounts while at work, respectively. The sceptics are also reluctant to share personal updates or pictures, especially on Twitter, but also on Facebook, where almost 80 per cent never or rarely share such information.

*The Networkers.* I have named the second cluster (N = 26) "the networkers" because their number-one social media activity is networking; in fact, they are the ones that find it most critical to follow "important people", and they find likes and comments significant. The networkers, however, also use social media for self-branding and "to be seen", and they use humour relatively often. In general, the networkers are enthusiastic social media users, except when it comes to expressing political opinions or engaging in political discussions; on these variables they have negative attitudes. Not very surprisingly, the networkers have many friends and followers on social media. They follow 667 Twitter profiles on average and have an average of 2,269 Twitter followers and 974 Facebook friends. All 26 respondents in the cluster report using Twitter for work and tweet a couple of times a week, whereas their Facebook activity is more private; very few have Facebook friends whom they do not know personally. When it comes to sharing personal updates and pictures, the networkers mainly use Facebook. Half report sharing such information on Facebook, whereas 92 per cent are reluctant to share personal updates or pictures on Twitter.

*The Two-Faced.* The respondents in the third cluster (N = 24) have been named "the two-faced" because they have mixed feelings towards social media. In regards to self-promoting purposes and expressing political opinions, they are very sceptical, even more so than the sceptics, but they are quite enthusiastic when it comes to other social media practices: The two-faced find it important to get many likes and comments, they use humour quite often, they are not reluctant to share, and they also use social media for networking purposes. What explains this group of respondents' ambivalent social media attitudes is that they use Twitter and Facebook very differently. Although all respondents except one have a Twitter profile, they are not active Twitter users and prefer to observe and almost never tweet, and they also have even fewer Twitter connections than the sceptics. On Facebook, however, they are very active: Almost 50 per cent report using Facebook "all the time", thus being the group that is definitely the most active on Facebook (in contrast, the share of "all the time" users among the sceptics, networkers, opiners, and sparks is 4.6 per cent, 23 per cent, 0 per cent, and 19 per cent, respectively). Still, their Facebook activity is limited to their off-line networks; most are friends with people whom they know personally, and a majority (17 out of 24) have closed Facebook profiles. Also, all the respondents in the two-faced cluster except one are reluctant to share personal updates and pictures on Twitter, whereas on Facebook, 14 out of 24 report publishing such information frequently.

*The Opiners.* The smallest cluster (N = 16) accounts for only 12 per cent of the journalists, and I call this group "the opiners" because they stand out from the others primarily because they find expressing opinions the least problematic. On most of the other variables, like

self-promotion, networking, popularity, and use of humour, they have middle values, indicating that they engage somewhat in such practices. In general, however, the opiners are not the keenest sharers in social media. They tweet less frequently than the networkers, they report spending less time on social media than both the networkers and the two-faced, and they also follow relatively few Twitter profiles, 400 on average. Yet the opiners do log on to their Twitter accounts relatively often; as many as 11 out of 16 at least once a day, and they are also very popular in social media, with 4,000 Twitter followers and 1,364 Facebook friends on average. The opiners are quite public in their use of social media: Everyone uses their Twitter and Facebook profiles in relation to work, 11 out of 16 have completely open Facebook profiles, and 13 out of 16 have many Facebook friends whom they do not know personally. All the same, they are reluctant to share personal updates and pictures both on Facebook and Twitter; only two of the respondents in the cluster report sharing such information often – on Facebook.

*The Sparks.* The final cluster (N = 21) consists of journalists who have really embraced social media as a part of their personal and private life. Indeed, they have been named “the sparks” to describe their “sparkling” social media practices. The sparks have high scores on all social media attitude variables; they use social media for self-promoting, networking, and for discussing politics, and they also use humour often and find likes and comments important. Many of the sparks also run blogs; out of all 135 journalists in the dataset, nine report running a blog that they update regularly, and out of these, six are grouped in the sparks cluster. The sparks have an impressive amount of connections in social media, with 7,803 Twitter followers and 2,220 Facebook friends on average, and they also follow a large number of Twitter profiles – 1,324 on average. This makes them different from the opiners, who also have many followers but don’t follow that many profiles themselves. As would be expected, the sparks are very active Twitter users; all 21 respondents in the group use Twitter “all the time” or several times per day, and also related to work. Their Facebook use, however, is a little less enthusiastic. Four of the respondents in the group only log on to Facebook a few times a week, one third have closed Facebook-accounts, and two don’t even have a Facebook profile. As for sharing personal updates and pictures, 11 out of 21 sparks report doing this often on Facebook, whereas only three do this often on Twitter.

To sum up, the most enthusiastic social media users among the political news journalists are definitely the sparks, followed by the networkers and the opiners. The most cautious social media users are the two-faced and the sceptics; the two-faced, though, do use Facebook extensively, but mainly in a private context. By displaying the distances between the final cluster centres, table 2 shows how different the five clusters of journalists are on a scale from 1 to 10. The most similar types are the sceptics and the two-faced, with a distance of 3.724. The second most similar types are the networkers and the opiners, at 3.779. The cluster that differs most from all the others is the sparks. The distance between the sparks and the sceptics is almost as far as can be, at 9.216.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

### *Features of the Different User Types*

Table 3 below illustrates the main characteristics of the cluster members by displaying their distribution on several demographic variables, and also the scores discrepancy (in per cent) from what would be expected based on the demographics in the whole dataset. Because the study has a relatively small N, the values are displayed in absolute figures and not in per cent. Furthermore, because of the relatively small N (at least in the different clusters) very few of the findings are likely to be statistically significant, and I will therefore focus on the scores that differ noticeably from what would be expected and not pay too much attention to subgroups with a very small N. Also, naturally, all findings are interpreted with caution.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The most striking result to emerge from the data is a distinct difference between the shares of reporters and editors/columnists in the different clusters: Journalists who work mostly as reporters heavily dominate the sceptics, networkers, and two-faced clusters (87.2 per cent of the respondents in these three clusters combined, are reporters), and journalists who often engage in political commentary, editors and columnists, make up the majority of the opiners and sparks clusters (only 11 out of 37 opiners and sparks are reporters, and only six of these work exclusively as reporters). As described in the findings section of the paper, the sceptics, networkers and two-faced are reluctant to discuss politics and share political opinions in social media, whereas the opiners and sparks are not, and these findings thus complement Singer's 2005 study of journalist bloggers, which found that the majority of the journalists who expressed political opinions were political commentators already comfortable incorporating opinion into what they wrote. Moreover, the high share of reporters in the first three clusters demonstrates that most political reporters do not act as political pundits in social media, thus enshrining their political neutrality (and the difference between the shares of reporters in the first three and the last two clusters is even statistically significant at a 1 per cent level).

Former research on "regular" journalists has found online journalists to be more enthusiastic social media users than journalists in other media sectors. As the figures in table 3 show, online journalists are slightly overrepresented in the opining and sparks clusters, but they are underrepresented in the networkers cluster. And in the sparks cluster, all online journalists except for one are columnists. This might have to do with an interaction effect: Columnists who work online are apt to be very active social media users. Newspaper journalists are also overrepresented in the opining and sparks clusters, but this is due to the large share of editors and columnists in these clusters, and the fact that the majority of editors (57.5 per cent) and columnists (82 per cent) in the whole selection work in newspapers. Moreover, the media sector variables are not mutually exclusive, and there is a considerable overlap between online and newspaper journalists (out of the 43 online journalists in the dataset, only 8 do not also work at a newspaper).

In regards to media type, tabloid journalists are overrepresented in the networkers and sparks clusters, which are the clusters with the most positive attitudes towards self-branding, networking, and humour, thus complimenting former research that has found tabloid journalists to be more active social media users (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013). As for the difference between elite and less elite journalists, however, the figures in table 3 do not compliment former research. In fact, elite journalists are overrepresented in the networkers cluster, and less

elite journalists are overrepresented in the two-faced cluster, showing the direct opposite from the American studies (Lasorsa et al. 2011; Holton and Lewis 2011) that found less elite journalists to be more active social media users. Since the operationalisation of “elite media” encompasses larger, well-known media organisations, these findings do, nonetheless, complement Gulyas’s (2013) study of European journalists, which found journalists in large media organisations to be more enthusiastic social media users than journalists in smaller media organisations. Gulyas cited “organisational pressure”, including limited resources in smaller news organisations, to explain this finding. This is a plausible explanation in the Norwegian political news journalism context as well.

Age is often perceived as an important variable influencing use of new communication technologies, and former research has found younger journalists to be more active social media users than older journalists (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013). As seen in table 3, younger journalists are overrepresented in the networkers cluster, a finding that corresponds with this research; however, the opiners and sparks clusters are dominated by individuals older than 40. The reason for this, though, is yet again the high share of columnists and editors in these clusters. Many high-standing political commentators are in their 50s and 60s, and the average age for editors and columnists in the selection is as high as 44 and 47, respectively.

### **Concluding Discussion**

Social media allow everyone to show off their personalities and to publically express opinions and engage in discussions on politicised matters, and a pressing question, therefore, is whether traditional journalistic norms in political news journalism, like professional distance and neutrality, are being challenged as political news journalists engage in social media practices. This article set out to examine the way political news journalists use social media and asked if social media blur the boundaries between the personal and the professional, and also the boundaries between the political reporter and the political commentator, transforming all political news journalists into self-promoting political pundits. The study detected five different types of social media users (the sceptics, the networkers, the two-faced, the opiners and the sparks), revealing that political news journalists’ social media practices vary the most when it comes to self-promoting and opining, and that political news journalists working as political commentators were more inclined to challenge traditional journalistic norms when using social media than journalists working in political reporting.

In regards to professional distance, the study found that most political news journalists uphold this norm. The networkers and the two-faced share personal information on social media but mainly via closed Facebook accounts, and the majority of the opiners, many of whom have completely open Facebook profiles, rarely share private information. Many of the sparks, however, do share a lot of personal information on Facebook, and many have public Facebook accounts, thus complimenting Hedman and Djerf-Pierre’s (2013) study that found frequent social media users more inclined to accept blurring of the boundaries between their private and professional lives. Still, only three of the sparks (and six journalists in the whole selection) report sharing personal updates and pictures on Twitter, signifying that the political news journalists

use Twitter almost exclusively in a non-private manner and indicating that political news journalists to a large extent separate the private and the professional when using social media.

Political reporters have traditionally been expected to keep their politics and personal opinions to themselves, and the findings in this study indicate that this norm still stands. In fact, the most important background variable to explain political news journalists' use of social media is position, more so than both age and media sector which are variables that have been important in explaining "regular" journalists' social media practices. The study finds that many columnists and editors use social media extensively to discuss and comment politics, but also that very few political news reporters (only six out of 86) feel comfortable sharing personal opinions or engaging in political discussions in social media. Indeed, the study's main finding is that practically all the reporters in the selection are reluctant to use social media to market themselves as political pundits. Despite having to conceal their political sympathies, however, the study finds that the reporters in the networkers cluster do engage actively in social media and score high on measures related to self-branding. Nevertheless, these highly active reporters might use social media this way with ambitions of one day becoming political commentators.

The group of journalists to be investigated in this study was the members of the Norwegian Parliamentary Press Galley, an exclusive group of journalists with close ties to Norwegian MPs, and the findings might thus be generalizable to similar groups of journalists in countries with political conditions similar to Norway. Although Norway is a small country, and the sample of journalists in this study was limited, the division between political reporting and political commentary is applicable to many other countries, and the knowledge generated about the differences between reporters and commentators generated in the study, especially, might have value across national borders.

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**TABLE 1**

Five clusters of political news journalists, final cluster centres (scores between 1 and 5) on 17 variables concerning social media use and attitudes.

	<b>The sceptics</b>	<b>The networkers</b>	<b>The two-faced</b>	<b>The opiners</b>	<b>The sparks</b>
<b>Self-promoting</b>					
Uses social media for self-promoting purposes	4.43	2.38	3.65	3.33	2.10
Wants to be seen	4.68	2.56	4.73	3.33	1.67
Wants to build a name	4.78	3.44	4.81	3.73	2.24
<b>Networking/popularity</b>					
Uses social media for networking purposes	3.79	2.04	2.30	3.07	1.65
Wants to follow important people	3.81	2.04	2.26	3.00	2.19
Finds likes and comments important	4.39	2.77	2.70	3.20	2.33
<b>Opining/humour</b>					
Finds expressing of political opinions unproblematic	4.53	4.48	4.57	2.00	2.24
Likes to discuss politics	4.62	3.80	4.26	2.57	1.57
Uses humour	3.73	2.24	2.26	3.20	1.90
<b>Sharing/monitoring</b>					
Is reluctant to share (turned)	4.12	3.23	2.70	3.20	1.55
Prefers to observe (on Twitter) (turned)	4.10	3.88	4.36	3.87	1.90
<b>Relevance of social media</b>					
Finds social media best suited for entertainment purposes (turned)	3.26	2.38	2.23	2.73	1.86
<b>Quantity of use</b>					
Number of profiles followed on Twitter	3.87	2.50	4.26	3.46	1.71
Number of followers on Twitter	3.83	2.63	4.26	2.31	1.57
Tweeting frequency	4.29	3.17	4.26	3.87	1.52
Number of Facebook friends	3.61	2.73	3.33	2.46	1.89
Time spent in social media	4.21	3.58	3.21	4.06	3.25
N	44	26	24	16	21

High scores indicate low values on attitudes and use (5 is minimum and 1 is maximum). The variables that were most central in the formation of the clusters are shaded grey (the more important, the darker the shade).

N = 131, 4 missing (non-users).

**TABLE 2**

The five clusters similarity to each other (distance between the cluster centres on a scale from 1 to 10).

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	<b>The networkers</b>	<b>The two-faced</b>	<b>The opiners</b>	<b>The sparks</b>
<b>The sceptics</b>	5.434	3.724	4.770	9.216
<b>The networkers</b>		4.151	3.779	5.004
<b>The two-faced</b>			4.663	8.017
<b>The opiners</b>				5.487

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Low value indicates similarity (1 equals total similarity); high value indicates dissimilarity (10 equals total dissimilarity).

**TABLE 3**

The cluster members' distribution on several demographic variables, in absolute figures and percentage above or below what is expected based on the demographics of the whole selection.

	<b>The sceptics</b>	<b>The networkers</b>	<b>The two- faced</b>	<b>The opiners</b>	<b>The sparks</b>	N
<b>Age</b>						
40 <	16 (-2.6)	<b>14 (+11.3)</b>	<b>13 (+12)</b>	4 (-16.2)	7 (-12)	54
40 >	20 (+2.6)	10 (-11.3)	9 (-12)	<b>9 (+16.2)</b>	<b>13 (+12)</b>	61
<b>Position*</b>						
Reporters	35 (+13.6)	19 (+7.2)	21 (+21.6)	5 (-34.7)	6 (-37.3)	86
Columnists	9 (-12.1)	5 (-13.4)	3 (-20.1)	<b>8 (+17.5)</b>	<b>17 (+48.4)</b>	42
Editors	7 (-13.9)	7 (-2.7)	5 (-8.8)	<b>6 (+7.9)</b>	<b>14 (+37.1)</b>	39
<b>Media sector*</b>						
TV	7 (+1.1)	5 (+4.4)	2 (-6.5)	3 (+4)	3 (-0.5)	20
Radio	3 (-2.8)	4 (+5.8)	5 (+11.2)	- (-6.8)	- (-6.8)	12
Newspaper	30 (+3)	15 (-8)	12 (-15.2)	<b>13 (+16)</b>	<b>15 (+6.2)</b>	85
Online	12 (-4.6)	7 (-5)	3 (-19.4)	<b>8 (+18.1)</b>	<b>11 (+20.5)</b>	41
News agency	4 (+1)	- (-8.1)	6 (+16.9)	- (-8.1)	1 (-3.3)	11
<b>Media type</b>						
Tabloid	10 (-7.7)	<b>11 (+11.9)</b>	5 (-9.6)	5 (+0.9)	<b>9 (+11.6)</b>	40
Non-tabloid	34 (+7.7)	15 (-11.9)	19 (+9.6)	11 (-0.9)	12 (-11.6)	91
Elite	17 (-1.6)	<b>12 (+9.2)</b>	6 (-12)	6 (+0.5)	8 (+1.1)	49
Less elite	27 (+1.6)	14 (-9.2)	<b>18 (+12)</b>	10 (-0.5)	13 (-1.1)	82
N	44	26	24	16	21	

\*The variables "position" and "media sector" are not mutually exclusive; the figures indicate the number of respondents reporting to work in this position or sector on a daily or weekly basis.

N = 131, 4 missing (non-users)