Authenticity and intimacy in live blogs about the US presidential debates

The present contribution engages with the larger topic of discourse and politics through assessing live blogging (LB; Thurman & Walters, 2013) as a form of web-native (political) journalism. Discourse practices in online reporting have been found to be characterized by hybridity in terms of (i) sticking to strategic rituals of objectivity to create accountability on the one hand (e.g. Singer 2005; Lasorsa et al. 2012) while (ii) also being marked by storytelling or "news as narrative" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Schmidt, 2019) to make the world more transparent, recognizable, and graspable. Relating to the latter in LB specifically, Tereszkiewicz (2014) discussed how it creates polyvocality by relying on amateur sources and featuring interactions between reporters and users. From a similar vantage point, Steensen (2016) described an "intimization of journalism" by increasingly blurred boundaries between the personal and the professional perspective on social media.

The present study, which uses political LB about the 2020 presidential debates in the United States as a case in point, explores whether such LB represents polyvocal discourse involving the expansion of voices and perspectives, fostering authenticity through including everyday voices as sources and emphasizing transparency through the presence of a reliable narrator who regularly provides updates and fact-checks; and (ii) whether it simultaneously is a form of intimate discourse representing immediacy and emotionality, blending the professional and private roles of the communicator and the audience.

The study relies on a purpose-built corpus of LB coverage of the two televised US presidential debates (Donald Trump vs. Joe Biden). Data were collected from four popular media outlets (*The Guardian, Daily Mirror; New York Times, Wall Street Journal*). The overall corpus size amounts to 61,490 tokens. To facilitate a discourse-oriented mixed-methods approach (Bednarek & Carr, 2021) a combined quantitative-qualitative analysis with *AntConc* and *MAXQDA* was conducted. For the operationalization of the hypotheses established categorizations from journalism studies (e.g. Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Bruns, 2018) to annotate sourcing practices, (multimodal) markers of transparency and authenticity, as well as (lack of) linguistic indicators of journalistic objectivity were applied.

As is visible both in sourcing and from a linguistic perspective, the results highlight the above-mentioned practices of blending and the integration of new media practices that result in creating different modes of conveying information through storytelling and thus create journalistic perspectives that are accountable, intimate and authentic.

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