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# SOCIAL MEDIA JOURNALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF TWITTER(X)

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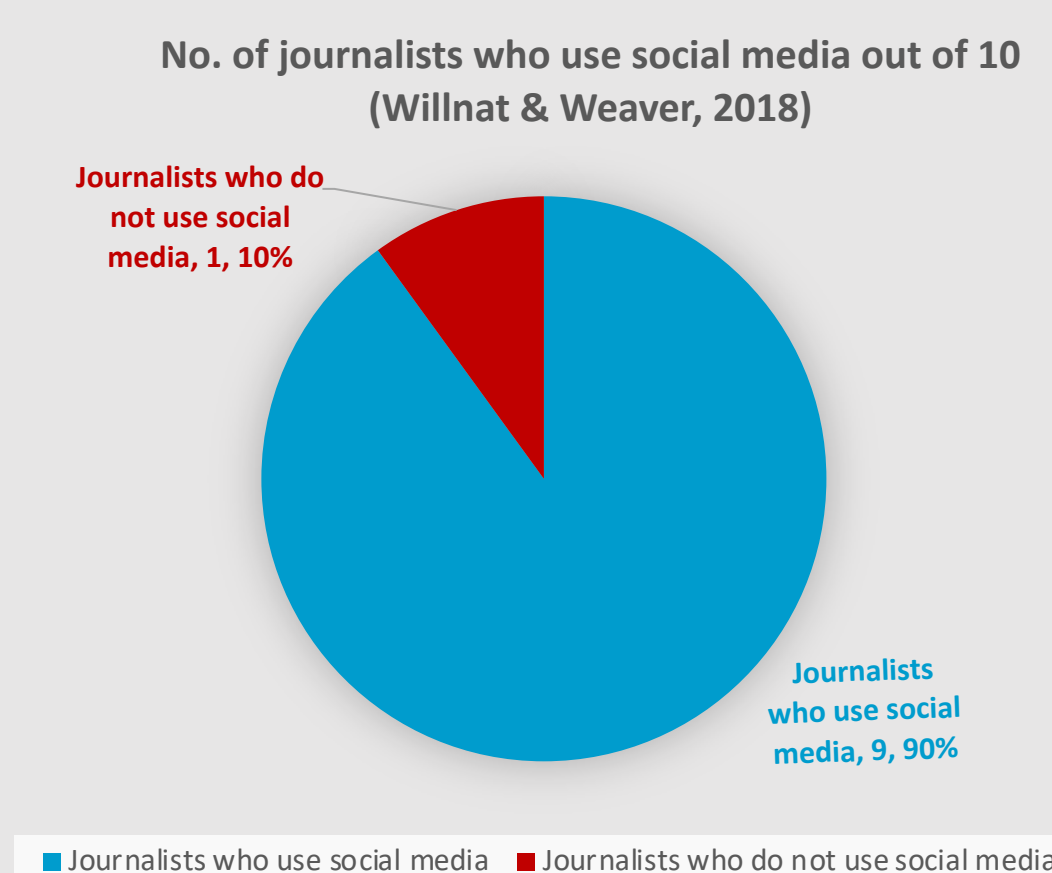
School of  
Communication

## ABSTRACT

Traditional journalism has converged with digital media to provide easier and accessible ways of news production and distribution. Several studies have interrogated the impacts of social media on journalism, but less has been studied on specific mediums and how they impact some of the traditional journalistic roles of addressing social issues. This study specifically adopted a user approach in identifying the roles of news organizations and journalists on X and how those roles influence social change initiatives utilizing the agenda-setting model. A correlational analysis conducted showed that there is a significant positive relationship between user engagement with news organization tweets and a positive attitude toward activism exemplified by participants' own involvement in activism or their perceptions of positive outcomes. Implications are discussed.

## BACKGROUND

- Majority of journalists today (9 of 10) use social media platforms in their work (Willnat & Weaver, 2018).



- According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, Twitter (X) has been particularly identified as the most used social media platform by journalists (Jurkowitz & Gottfried, 2022)
- Journalists use the platform to surface the voices of ordinary people (Molyneux & McGregor, 2021). The platform has also been a hub for digital **activism** in recent years.
- Less has been studied about the news media's impact on activism through social media platforms.
- Past studies about their use of Twitter have mainly focused on the content journalists post in their timelines, with close to no consideration of how they interact with their followers and how followers react to such content (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017).

## PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

Utilizing the agenda setting model as theoretical framework, this study aims to examine X users' perceptions of the effects of news coverage on activism using the platform. Specific objectives to this end are as follows:

- To identify Twitter(X) users' source of news on social media
- To determine Twitter(X) users' level of engagement with news organizations on the platform
- To examine the relationship between engagement with news organization tweets and users' attitude towards social change activism

**Hypothesis: H<sub>1</sub>:** News organizations' use of Twitter has a positive impact on activism

## DESIGN & METHODS

### A. Participants

The sample consisted of 85 participants who were college students in both the US and Ghana and were frequent Twitter users.

**USA:** 54

**Ghana:** 30

**Undisclosed Country:** 1

### B. Procedure

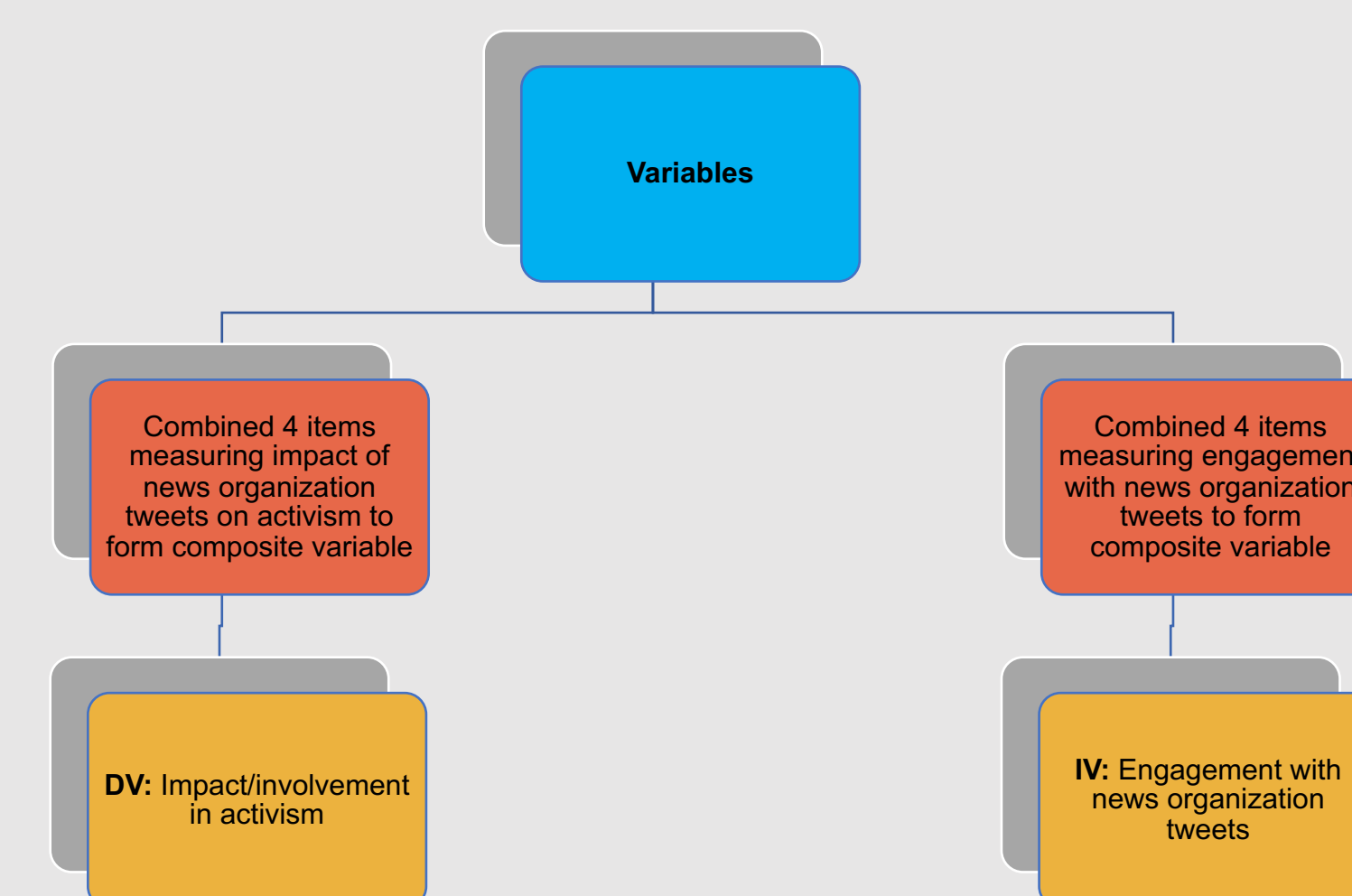
Data collected from an online survey through WMU Qualtrics platform

### C. Instruments

5-point Likert scales were used to determine participants' sources of news content, their level of engagement with news content on Twitter, and to examine the relationship between engagement with news organization tweets and users' attitude towards social change activism

### D. Statistical procedure

Pearson moment correlational analysis using SPSS software



## RESULTS

### 1. Sources of News on Social Media

77,6 %

News org./journalist followed on social networking sites

57,6 %

Twitter(X) updates from news org./journalist

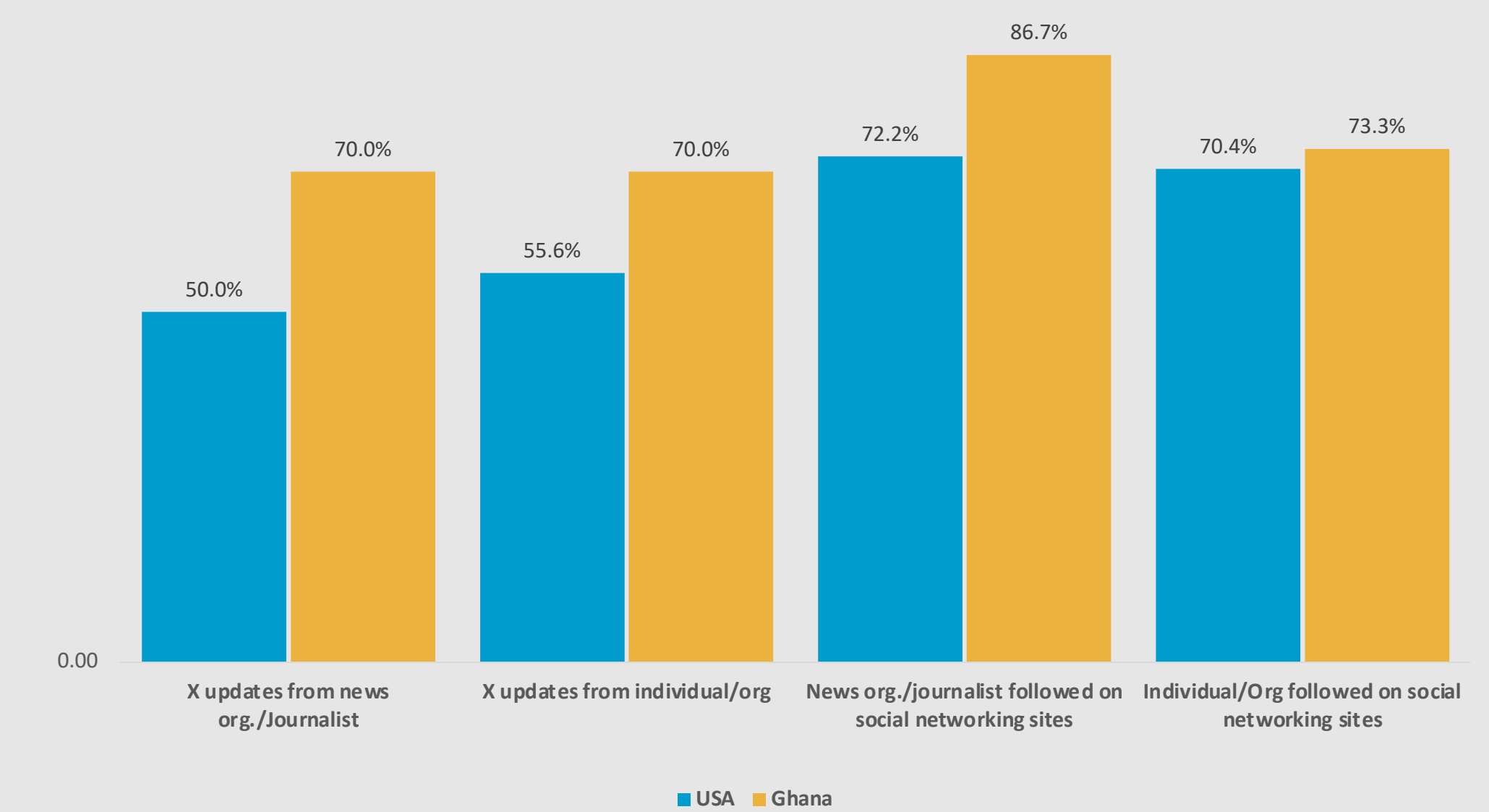
71,8 %

Individual/Org followed on social networking sites

61 %

Twitter(X) updates from another individual/org.

### Comparison



**Summary:** While Twitter is the platform for news especially for journalists, it is not necessarily the case for users. Also, more Americans get their news from social media platforms outside of Twitter than they do on Twitter.

### 2. Level of Engagement with the news media on Twitter

01 64,7 %

Look at News Organization tweets

Those who answered "sometimes" (n = 26), "always" (n = 11) or "often" (n = 18),

02 65,9 %

Retweet a member of the news media

Those who either **never** retweeted a member of the news media (n = 27) or rarely did (n = 29)

03 87,1 %

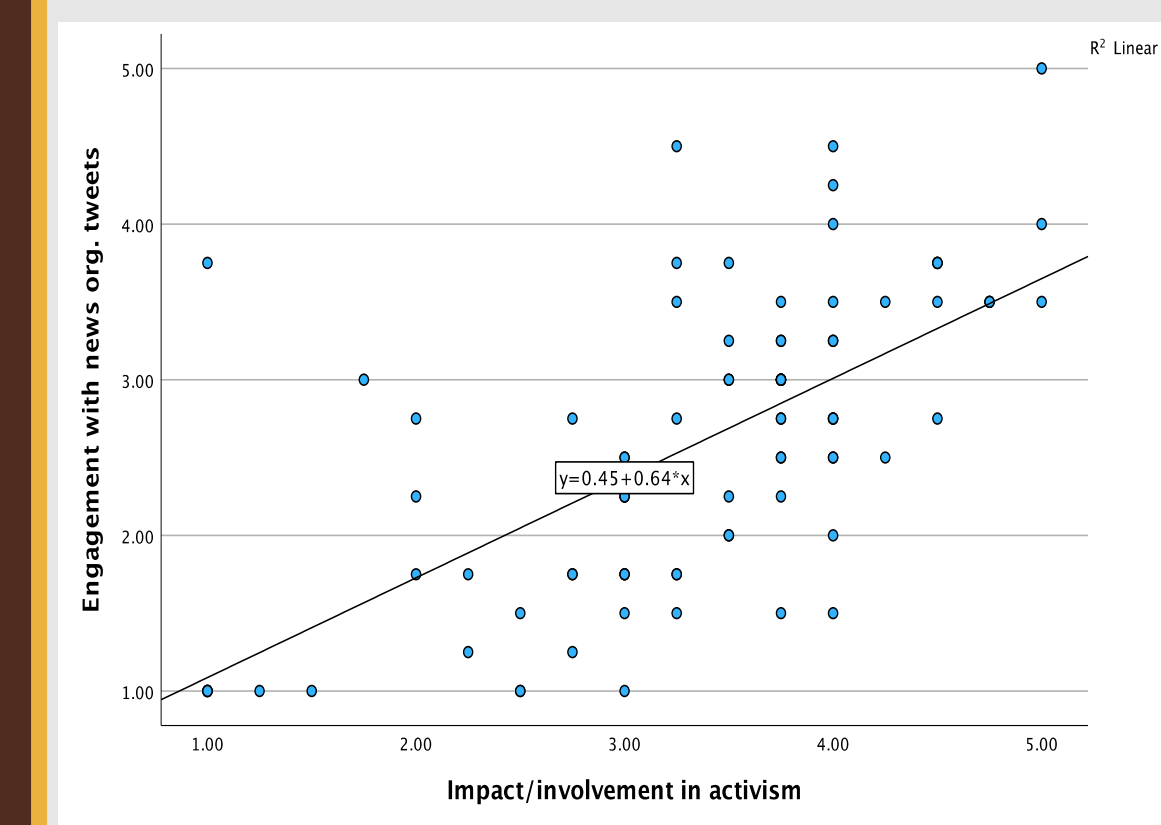
Ask questions (DM or @ mention) to a member of the news media

Those who either **never** asked questions to a member of the news media (n = 43) or rarely did (n = 31).

**Summary:** Most users who look to news organizations on Twitter for news engage with them only passively not actively

### 3. Relationship between engagement with news organization tweets and users' attitude toward social change activism

Results from the correlational analysis indicated that there was a significant **positive relationship** between engagement with news organization tweets and perceived impact/involvement in activism,  $r(83) = .65, p < .01$ . The users who engaged more with news organization tweets strongly responded that they themselves **were either influenced to engage in activism** through actions such as signing petitions or joining protests, or they perceived impacts in terms of **how authorities responded** to the issues which they attributed to the tweets - these responses included actions such as releasing statements or tangibly instituting policies and changing laws.



**Summary:** There is a positive relationship between users' engagement with news organizations and their attitude towards activism

## CONCLUSION/IMPLICATIONS

- The news media can expect to impact the public agenda, activism and policy decisions if they continue to be on social media
- News organizations will continue to affect the understanding of issues even outside of traditional norms
- There should be continued acknowledgement that news organizations are one of many entities influencing the public agenda on social media