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Cultural Clicks: Why Strategic Election News Does Not Resonate the Same Across English- and Spanish-Language Media Audiences in the United States

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This study examines news sharing during U.S. primary debates, adding two comparative dimensions to existing research: it compares news-sharing behavior between English- and Spanish-language media and across Facebook and X/Twitter audiences. Our results contradict previous assumptions that horserace and strategic coverage of election news appeal to news audiences cross-culturally. News posts focusing on horserace coverage, candidate personalities, and candidate attacks were more likely to be shared by English media audiences than by audiences sharing debate news from Spanish-language broadcasters. Yet for both English- and Spanish-language audiences, strategic coverage of the debates was more likely to be shared on X/Twitter than Facebook. These findings highlight the importance of not only structural but also sociocultural differences that explain news sharing. Future research may want to critically question the homogeneity of nation states about social media news audiences.

Keywords: news sharing, Spanish-language media, strategic news, horserace coverage, social media, political debates, 2020 U.S. primary election

In recent decades, growing research interest has explored digital news flows to understand how information spreads in today's media ecosystem. A focus on user engagement with quality news sharing is especially relevant, as it indicates audience involvement with election-related content (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015), which may lead to different patterns in voter learning and participation. Literature in this domain has independently explored the role of structural characteristics of news content (e.g., Choi, Lee, & Ji, 2021; Karnowski, Leiner, Kümpel, & Leonhard, 2021) and audience characteristics (e.g., Karnowski, Leonhard, & Kümpel, 2018) in shaping the virality of political news and the gatekeeping forces in the new media ecology. Adding a comparative lens to this literature, we raise an important unaddressed question: *Is there a substantial difference in the sharing of election news on social media between different sociocultural media audiences?* We explore this question in the context of the 2020 U.S. Primary Democratic

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Debates. Focusing on strategic and horserace framing, as well as negative reporting (Esser & Strömbäck, 2012), we adopt a comparative approach to investigate which types of political debate-related news are more likely to be shared on social media platforms, exploring the compatibility between news dissemination patterns across English- and Spanish- language media in the United States.

Given the increasing importance of Hispanic voters in the United States, there is a pressing need to investigate how Spanish and bilingual news organizations engage audiences with election-related news. Over 36 million Latinos were eligible to vote in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, representing 15% of the nation's eligible voters. However, the turnout rates of Latino voters trail behind other racial groups (Krogstad, Passel, Budiman, & Natarajan, 2024), raising questions about representation and civic participation. Latinx media are key actors in contemporary bilingual and bicultural digital spaces (Sanchez-Muñoz & Retis, 2022, p. 58) and might represent valid institutions that foster voter engagement within the Latino community. Yet, there remains a gap in understanding the role ethnicity and race play in contemporary digital journalism and politics (Lane, Do, & Molina-Roger, 2022), although research suggests that racial minorities have unique identity-related experiences on social media.

Alongside English-language outlets, such as ABC, NBC, CNN, and MSNBC, Spanish media organizations like Univision and Telemundo have become important hosts of political debates in recent decades, and our study provides evidence of their role in engaging Hispanic voters during this crucial decision-making time. However, Latinx media audiences in the United States may engage differently with certain election news frames on social media, such as horserace coverage or negative reporting. News-sharing experiences may vary, considering the different cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which Spanish-language audiences navigate digital news. Differences in how diverse sociocultural audiences respond to news frames on social media are important, as they may challenge assumptions about audience demand for horserace and negative news across audience profiles.

Meanwhile, we lack sufficient insight into the impact that political events, such as televised political debates, have on news-sharing behavior. The current hybrid media environment can presumably enhance the role of televised political debates in campaigns and extend the shelf life of news coverage beyond the two-hour broadcast. Political debates can stimulate subsequent news consumption and political conversation (Cho & Choy, 2011). Yet, very few studies have examined how election framing influences news-sharing behavior on social media (Gonçalves, Pereira, & Torres da Silva, 2020; Ørmen, 2019), and none have studied potential cross-cultural differences in news-sharing behavior. The current study contributes to this literature by examining the role of strategic coverage, horserace framing, and negative reporting in debate news sharing on social media—adding a cross-cultural lens between English and Spanish news media. While many scholars have problematized the democratic consequences of horserace reporting (Zoizner, 2021), a few argue that such coverage has the potential to engage audiences with election news, which can lead to higher interest in elections (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Trussler & Soroka, 2014). In this article, we argue that consumer demand for horserace (Iyengar et al., 2004) and cynical election coverage (Trussler & Soroka, 2014) depends on where audiences encounter news (Ørmen, 2019). Hence, in addition to exploring differences in news-sharing behavior on English and Spanish language broadcasters, we also compare different debate news sharing across Facebook and X. Merging content analysis (N = 1,716) with user behavioral data on social media across four primary political debates that were co-moderated by English

(ABC, NBC, MSNBC, and CNN) and Spanish language broadcasters (Telemundo and Univision), we found interesting nuances in how English and Spanish media audiences engage with debate reporting.

Theory and Relevant Literature

Given that the news audiences are socially constructed by journalists and that media producers often target niche audiences, we expect Spanish-language media in the United States to produce different types of stories during political debates than English-language media for the following reasons: News produced in the Spanish language is directed toward an audience that is socioculturally and socioeconomically different from the English-language media audience in the United States: Hispanics are more than twice less likely as Whites to be living in poverty, and more Hispanics (52%) than Whites (30%) reported experiencing discrimination because of their ethnicity (Krogstad & Lopez, 2016). Given this context, it seems relevant to think about two levels for this analysis: the news post level and the news-sharing level. For the post level, we focused on the framing of the debate, and for news sharing, we focused on differences across sociocultural groups. We first elaborate on the theoretical framework of news sharing and then theorize the framing strategies of Spanish- and English-language media in the context of political debates.

News Sharing During Elections: Perspectives on Demand and Supply

The growing empirical literature on news sharing argues that certain structural characteristics of news content—such as news values, news frames, and news topics—make news stories more ‘shareworthy’ (e.g., Choi et al., 2021; Karnowski et al., 2021), while more recent studies specifically connect election framing with news-sharing behavior on social media (Gonçalves et al., 2020; Ørmen, 2019). Guided by political journalism scholarship, we test whether certain facets of election news framing predominant in news coverage appeal equally to English and Spanish language media audiences.

News coverage of elections tends to marginalize substantive coverage of issues and ideologies related to everyday problems and proposed solutions (Esser & Strömbäck, 2012, p. 318), predominantly concentrating on political campaigns and adopting a strategic game reporting style. Strategic framing focuses on candidates’ motives and the strategies they use to win elections, while game framing emphasizes who is winning or losing elections and often involves a language drawn from war or games (Aalberg et al., 2012, p. 172). In addition, political reporting in general and election news more specifically have a bias toward negativity, confrontation, and conflict. Many scholars have criticized these features of election coverage, arguing that strategic, horserace, and negative election reporting decreases political knowledge, increases cynical attitudes toward politics, and lowers political participation (Zoizner, 2021).

The predominance of this strategic game frame and negativity has been partially explained by audience logic, namely audience demand for it (Cushion & Thomas, 2018). It is assumed that audiences are more cognitively, emotionally, and physically aroused by news emphasizing clashes, conflict, disagreement, and drama, which dictates news framing. However, empirical evidence provides inconsistent support for this hypothesis. Some earlier studies suggest that audiences engage more heavily on social media with strategic game framing (Iyengar et al., 2004; Stroud & Muddiman, 2019; Trussler & Soroka, 2014) and negative news (Soroka, Fournier, & Nir, 2019). While other studies provide empirical support for the “news-sharing

gap” hypothesis, which emphasizes the difference between what news producers and audiences share on social media (de León & Vermeer, 2022; Masullo, Jennings, & Stroud, 2022). Evidence relevant to this study suggests the persistence of this gap with social media sharing of election news that adopts a strategic game frame and is negative (Ørmen, 2019; Stroud & Muddiman, 2019).

The practice of sharing news is arguably complex, and such behavioral discrepancies can be explained by a combination of factors, such as media strategies, user motivations, platform affordance, algorithms, or audience demographics. In this article, we focus on news-sharing behaviors across English and Spanish language news media outlets, exploring whether horserace framing of election news appeals equally to different sociocultural audiences. Acknowledging the potential heterogeneity of audiences within English and Spanish language outlets, we argue below that the different positioning of Spanish language media in the United States media market from their English language counterparts might explain cross-cultural differences in news sharing.

Identity-Based Logic for News Sharing

Spanish-language media has been an integral part of the United States’ media landscape for more than a century. While more than six hundred Latino news media outlets currently operate in the United States, Univision and Telemundo remain the two key news providers for Spanish speakers in the United States (Retis, 2019). Half of U.S. Hispanic adults say they at least sometimes get news from Hispanic news outlets, while Latinos and Hispanics born outside of the United States predominantly rely on Spanish language media as their news source (Naseer & Lipka, 2024).

Although the corporate structure of Spanish-language media in the United States resembles its English-language counterparts, Hispanic media differ in their role performance while serving a specific pan-ethnic audience from the growing Latinx communities in the United States. They appeal to their audiences by reporting disproportionately more than their English counterparts on issues relevant to Latino communities (Eshbaugh-Soha & Balarezo, 2014; Fowler, Hale, & Olsen, 2009) and often advocate for immigrants marginalized by discriminatory political, linguistic, and cultural policies (Retis, 2019). The differences between English and Spanish language media also relate to the tone of coverage of specific issues (Branton & Dunaway, 2008; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2014). For example, Hispanic audiences’ preference for constructive immigration news coverage can dictate more positive coverage of this issue on Spanish-language news, but not English-language news (Branton & Dunaway, 2008). In addition, Spanish-language networks, Univision and Telemundo, implement strategies that connect more directly with their audiences than English-language media organizations in the United States, particularly during crises (Cárdenas, González de Bustamante, & Retis, 2021) and high-stakes political events such as presidential debates (Hellmueller, Camaj, Vallejo Vera, & Lindner, 2024).

While previous research has explored similarities and differences in news coverage of politics between English and Spanish media, no study has explored how the racial and ethnic identities of audiences might affect news-sharing behavior. Social identity theory (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002) provides a solid framework to explain potential differences in social media engagement between different racial groups. According to social identity theory, individuals self-categorize themselves in terms of the social groups they

belong to, which in turn determines their social behavior that enhances positive self-esteem. For example, when experiencing discrimination, racial minority groups are more likely to seek positive markers associated with their in-group and validation from their group members. Historically, Spanish-language media have served as key institutions through which Hispanic and bilingual communities in the United States have preserved their culture and collective identities and pushed for political recognition (Casillas, 2014; Darr, Perry, Dunaway, & Sui, 2020). Television channels such as Univision and Telemundo help build closer ties and stronger identification with the Hispanic community (Retis, 2019; Wilkinson, 2015). In some cases, just receiving political news in Spanish increased the feeling of inclusion and belonging among Spanish-speaking Latinos in the United States (Darr et al., 2020), given that the Spanish language serves as a unique ethnic identity prime.

Relevant to this study, previous research suggests that an individual's race or ethnicity shapes social experiences that are consequential for how they relate to and engage in politics broadly, and on social media more specifically (Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020; Lane et al., 2022). Individuals of different ethnicities turn to different communication channels in alignment with their linguistic and cultural orientations (Hellmueller et al., 2024). Minorities, including Hispanic news audiences, show higher levels of news use on social networking sites than non-Hispanic White audiences, yet the association between social media news use and online participation still seems stronger for White audiences (Lane et al., 2022; Wang, 2022). Thus, if ethnic group identity influences media choices, then it is reasonable to assume that it might also influence news-sharing behavior.

News sharing is a form of social signaling, where individuals share content to demonstrate allegiance to a particular group and maintain social cohesion (Goh, Ling, Huang, & Liew, 2019). Through sharing, people communicate their in-group membership and express solidarity with other members, hence sharing information that they presume will help their relationships and avoiding news sharing that might offend the group (Goh et al., 2019). Hence, news stories that align with the values and interests of a person's in-group are more likely to be shared, as they reinforce group identity and promote a sense of unity. If Latino and Hispanic audiences use Hispanic media in the United States to connect with their communities and ethnic identities, they might be more likely than English audiences to share issue-based news posts as a way to promote issues related to the Spanish community and maintain their social identity.

This rationale is supported by previous research that suggests that news selection, frame interpretation, and subsequent news sharing are linked to racial socialization and identity (Bigman, Smith, Williamson, Planey, & Smith, 2019). Racial characteristics of media recipients can influence selective attention to specific news content (Appiah, 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, & Alter, 2008), as ethnic consumers spend more time browsing and recalling information targeted to them (Appiah, 2003). More relevant to this study, racial identity influences how news media frames are interpreted both personally and socially by racial groups, driving selective sharing of news (Bigman et al., 2019).

Platform-Based Logic for News Sharing

Identity markers are more likely to drive behavior on some social media platforms than on others. While empirical evidence suggests the dominance of Facebook over X/Twitter as a major platform for news

sharing (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018; Valenzuela, Piña, & Ramírez, 2017), it also emphasizes that differences in sharing behavior across Facebook and X/Twitter are explained by the topic of news (Bright, 2016; Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018), journalistic frames used to report on politics (Valenzuela et al., 2017), and news factors (Karnowski et al., 2021).

Hence, the theoretical framework of platform affordance might provide an explanation worth exploring. Different affordances across social media platforms lead to different logics of news-sharing behavior (Karnowski et al., 2021). Different platforms shape online behavior through their intrinsic affordances, such as anonymity, moderation, and the types of social connections they promote. The platforms chosen for this study—Facebook and X (former Twitter)—are characterized by distinct affordances related to identification, moderation, and community features. For this study, we maintain that anonymity might be an important distinctive feature between Facebook (does not allow it) and X/Twitter (allows pseudonymous accounts) relevant to sharing behavior. Different from X/Twitter, online identities of Facebook users are closer to real life, with real names, profile pictures, and visible social connections. In the absence of social cues and constraints allowed by anonymity, users may feel disconnected from their identities and likely behave differently on these social platforms. On the other hand, the visibility and connectedness of Facebook may create social constraints that impact news sharing (Leonardi, 2014). Hence, Facebook users might feel more socially constrained to share debate-related news that emphasize the horserace aspect of the debate and negativity than on X/Twitter where social ties are weaker.

The above streams of theoretical frameworks—identity-based theories and platform affordances related to anonymity—can inform theoretical understanding and empirical investigation on news-sharing behavior of strategic reporting, horserace framing, and negative news coverage on social media. However, while this framework suggests potential differences between English and Spanish language media users, it does not provide solid grounds to predict these differences. Hence, we pose the following research questions:

- RQ1: What differences can be observed between English and Spanish language broadcaster users when comparing the sharing of news posts containing issue-based reporting, strategic, horserace, or negative framing?*
- RQ2: What differences can be observed between Facebook and X/Twitter when comparing the sharing of news posts containing issue-based reporting, strategic, horserace, or negative framing?*

Methodological Approach

Sampling

The data for this study were collected from televised political debates during the 2020 Democratic Primary elections, using the Crimson Hexagon software. Data collection focused on the social media pages of the news broadcasts that moderated and co-hosted the debates, given that broadcasting outlets make deliberate efforts to generate user interactions and real-time reactions to the live debates on their social media platforms (Evins, 2017). To maintain a consistent context for this study, we selected only content

from primary debates co-sponsored by a mix of English and Spanish language broadcasters. Our final sample includes data from the following primary debates: the first debate held on June 26–27, 2019, and the ninth debate held on February 19, 2020, both co-sponsored by NBC News, MSNBC, and Telemundo; the third debate held on September 12, 2019, co-sponsored by ABC News and Univision; and the 11th debate held on March 5, 2020 and co-sponsored by CNN and Univision.

In the first step, we collected all Facebook and X/Twitter posts on English- and Spanish-language national broadcasters' social media pages, posted from 7 pm until 2 am. This captured a time frame that included one hour before the debate, the live debate, and the hours immediately following the debate to capture pre- and post-debate news coverage that might have generated debate-related news interactions. From this sample, we selected only Facebook posts and tweets that specifically focused on debate coverage excluding duplicates. The sample included data from four national news broadcasters in English language (ABC = 282, NBC = 315, MSNBC = 384, CNN = 28) and two national broadcasters in Spanish language (Telemundo = 426, and Univision = 286) that were involved in moderating the debates. The final media sample included 1,716 social media posts across English language (N = 1,004) and Spanish language (N = 712) broadcasters.

While the sample sizes for individual media are unequal and provide some analytical limitations, the sample size between English language media (total 58%) and Spanish language media (total 42%) groups is closely related. It is worth noting that the selection of the media outlets that moderated the debates was done deliberately because of their specific differences in catering to majority English and majority Spanish audiences in the United States. Hence, while we are limited in our assumptions about the identity of the individuals that engage with debate-related social media posts of these media outlets, our analysis is based on the type of outlets that access the Spanish language market in the United States as an indirect measure of the type of audiences that self-select into these options.

Coding Categories

Dependent Variables

Sharing performance was measured by the number of shares and (re-)tweets a social media post reached 24 hours after its publication. These numbers were collected automatically using Crimson Hexagon.

Manually Coded Independent Variables

In addition to the post metadata (URL, name of the news outlet, title of the post, and publication date and time) automatically compiled during data collection, the independent variables measured in the manual content analysis included reporting characteristics of debate-related posts. Based on previous work, the authors developed a codebook for this study, which was used to manually code Facebook posts and tweets posted by news broadcasters. The coding was done by four graduate students who were extensively trained to use the codebook. Inter-coder reliability was established using ReCal (Freelon, 2010) on a random sample of 10% of the Facebook posts (Cohen's Kappa ranged from .66 to 1.0). Kappa coefficients are influenced by the prevalence of the attributes—if the prevalence index is high, chance

agreement is also high, and kappa is reduced accordingly (see a detailed description provided by Sim & Wright, 2005). Some of the measured variables had a high prevalence. Some statisticians have proposed adjustments that account for these influences, but this procedure is somewhat controversial (Hoehler, 2000). Hence, in our study, we decided to report Kappas as they are, following established guidelines in literature (see Fleiss, 1981) that propose the following standard thresholds for kappa coefficients: ≤ 0 = poor, $.01 - .20$ = slight, $.21 - .40$ = fair, $.41 - .60$ = moderate, $.61 - .80$ = substantial, and $.81 - 1$ = almost perfect.

Election Framing

We acknowledge that one of the most important dimensions of election news reporting is media depoliticization, conceptualized as news coverage that marginalizes “the core of politics—the substance, issues, ideologies, and linkages between real-world problems and proposed solutions” (Esser & Strömbäck, 2012, p. 318). In this study, we operationalize two aspects of depoliticization: issue coverage and strategy and game framing. First, we created a specific binary category that captured whether social media posts focused on issues discussed during the debate (*Kappa* = .80).

Following suggestions that strategic and game framing is a multidimensional concept (Aalberg et al., 2012), this concept was measured with three separate variables: strategy, horserace, and personality. First, we coded whether social media posts focused on *strategy reporting*, defined as “interpretations of candidates’ or parties’ motives for actions and positions; their strategies and tactics for achieving political or policy goals” (Aalberg et al., 2012, p. 172; example: what tactics are candidates using, debate preparations, campaign event; *Kappa* = .65). In addition, we created a separate variable for *horserace* coverage, which centers on who is winning or losing elections or debate performance (*Kappa* = .73). Although scholars tend to include candidate personality and style in the strategy coverage, in this study, we follow Esser and Stromback (2012) in differentiating *candidate personality* as a distinct category that refers to the focus of news coverage on individual politicians, and in the context of political debates can include news focus on candidate personality traits and personal lives at the expense of parties, ideologies, or policies and if they discussed candidate character traits (example: their leadership, knowledge, morality, honesty, etc.; *Kappa* = .77).

Negative Coverage

We developed two measures for negative news coverage, designed to capture two different dimensions of negativity that are found in news reporting of election campaigns. Our first measure, called “candidate attacks,” captures negative campaigning transmitted via news reporting. We designed this as a dichotomous variable coded with two steps: first, we identified news posts that directly quoted or paraphrased candidates’ statements, and second, we coded those posts that emphasize candidates attacking their opponents as one (*Kappa* = .75). In addition, this study developed a categorical variable called “negative posts” to capture the negativity in the overall news reporting on social media. To do so, we first coded the valence of the whole post as positive, negative, and neutral, and then transformed this into a dichotomous variable denoting whether the social media post was negative or not.

Analytical Approach

Unequal sample sizes between English and Spanish language media limit our direct comparison between majority mainstream broadcasters in English language and minority broadcasters in Spanish language; hence, we choose to focus on within-group comparisons. First, to examine the characteristics of debate news framing and sharing, we aggregate news posts by media type, and then circulate the relative share by debate framing. In addition to mean values, we also report median values for shares, given their robustness when dealing with dispersed data. Evaluating fluctuations between media in different languages in the reporting and sharing of debate posts allows us to establish potential cultural differences in how televised debates are covered on social media and how different audiences might interact with that content.

In the second step of our analysis, we ran a total of four negative binomial regression models, using the number of Facebook shares and Twitter (re)-tweets reached by each social media post after 24 hours as the dependent variable. This mirrors the previous approaches where the number of shares is predicted using negative binomial regression models to account for overdispersed count data. We ran two separate models for English language and two models for Spanish language media, with social media post characteristics as independent variables. The first model within each group examines the relationship between news reporting characteristics and debate news sharing, and the second model explores interaction effects between news reporting and social media platforms. The results are presented in the form of incidence rate ratios (IRRs), with values less than one indicating a negative effect, and values higher than one indicating a positive effect. All models in our sample include controls for debate night content and individual media outlets within English and Spanish language media groups. Additionally, we control for other content characteristics that might be present in social media posts, including topics mentioned and multimedia features of social media posts, to ensure that significant relationships appear above and beyond the other variables in the models.

Data Analysis

Before addressing our research questions, we need to establish similarities and differences across our media samples. First, focusing on the news reporting styles, we notice important similarities between English and Spanish broadcasters. Strategy coverage was the most prevalent frame in both English (34.2%) and Spanish language (24.9%) broadcasters. While issue coverage and strategic framing were equally predominant in English broadcasters' debate-related posts, the percentage of Spanish broadcasters' posts that focused on issues (16%) was substantially less than in English media (31.5%; see Table 1). On the contrary, Spanish broadcasters had a significantly higher percentage of posts that focused on candidate personalities (21.9%) than English language broadcasters (5.9%). We also find some differences in how negativity is manifested in news coverage, where English language broadcasters contained a higher percentage of posts that focused on candidate attacks than Spanish media (11.9% versus 9%), while Spanish language broadcasters' posts contained more overall negativity (19.9% versus 12.8%).

Table 1. Distribution of Debate News Published and Shared on English and Spanish Language Broadcasters' Social Media Pages.

	News Posts			News Shares					
	Facebook	Twitter	Total	Facebook			Twitter		
				Mean	Median	Max	Mean	Median	Max
English Media (N = 1,004)									
Issue coverage	28%	32.4%	316 (31.5%)	380.2	83	12,000	140.1	48	5,082
Strategy	44.5%	31.3%	343 (34.2%)	229.3	48	8,900	116.5	43	4,166
Horserace	14.7%	19.1%	182 (18.1%)	113.5	48	880	107.0	34	4,166
Candidate Personality	15.6%	3.2%	59 (5.9%)	407.4	106	6,300	179	64	4,602
Negative Posts	24.8%	9.5%	129 (12.8%)	362.4	78	12,000	154.2	61	4,602
Candidate Attacks	19.9%	9.8%	119 (11.9%)	349.1	77	6,800	169.8	86	1,364
Spanish Media (N = 712)									
Issue coverage	20.1%	14.5%	114 (16%)	69.56	16	709	10.36	7	54
Strategy	27.8%	23.4%	177 (24.9%)	24.69	8	709	10.13	5	175
Horserace	7.3%	10.5%	67 (9.4%)	13.59	12	47	4.68	3	27
Candidate Personality	18.4%	23.6%	156 (21.9%)	23.63	7	194	14.02	4	410
Negative Posts	23.5%	18.2%	142 (19.9%)	33.27	10	709	10.20	7	72
Candidate Attacks	12.4%	7.5%	65 (9.1%)	21.31	7	194	12.84	5	721

Note. Percentages do not round up to 100, given that social media posts can be coded for multiple frames.

First, similar to previous research, we found that for both English- and Spanish-language media, the average number of shares was significantly higher for Facebook than for X/Twitter, although the distribution of shares was similarly skewed across both platforms (see Figure 1). Facebook shares show bigger spread, suggesting that most sharing activities revolved around a limited number of debate-related news posts across both media in English- and Spanish-language. However, we find some interesting differences when examining the type of posts that received the most shares. Posts that focused on candidate personality received the highest mean (407.43 for Facebook and 179 for X/Twitter) and median (106 for Facebook and 64 for X/Twitter) shares on the social media pages of English language news outlets. However,

on social media pages of Spanish broadcasters, the most shared debate-related posts were those that focused on issues (on Facebook: Mean = 69.56, Median = 16; X/Twitter: Mean = 10.36, Median = 7).

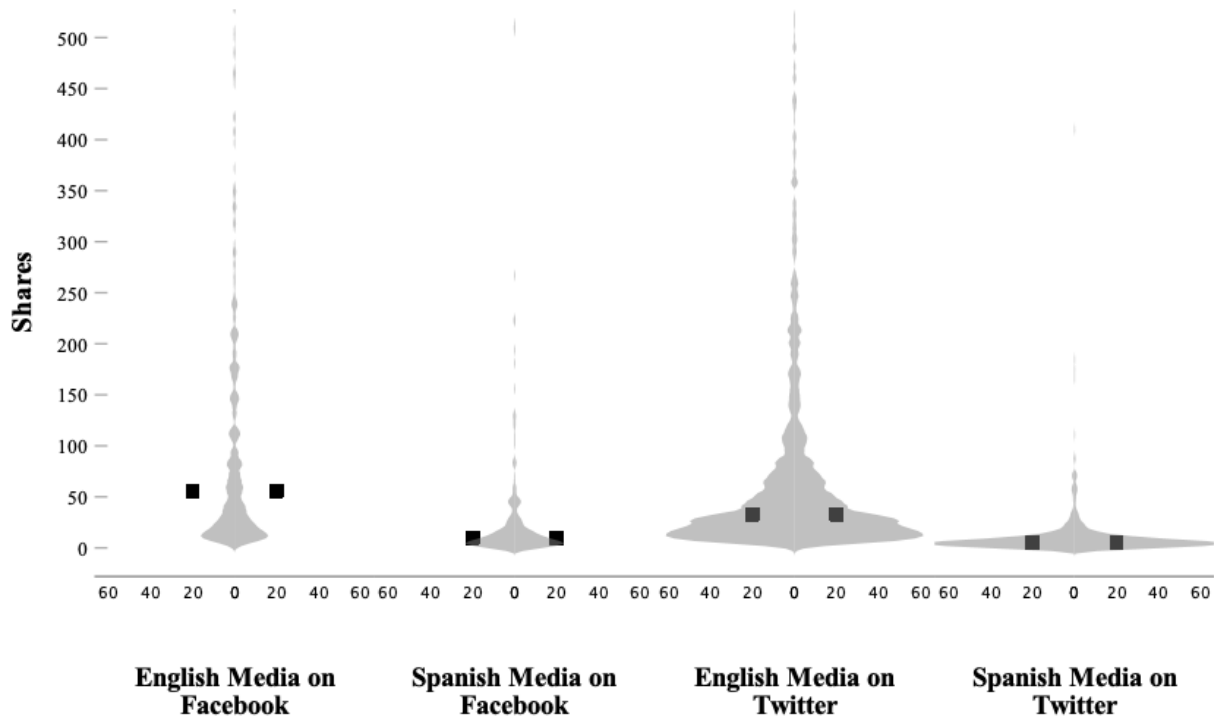


Figure 1. Violin plots of social media post shares across English and Spanish media. Violin bodies show kernel density (i.e., histograms); squares indicate median values per violin.

News Sharing on English and Spanish-Language Media

In the next step, we run four negative binomial models exploring the relationship between news reporting, SNS platforms, and sharing statistics for English and Spanish language broadcasters, controlling for a range of other factors. The data presented in Table 2 predict the main effects (model 1) and the interaction (model 2) effects for English language broadcasters, while the data presented in Table 3 predict the main (model 1) and interaction (2) effects for sharing behaviors on Spanish language broadcasters.

The first research question (RQ1) focuses on sharing differences between English- and Spanish-language broadcasters as a function of news frames in debate-related posts. The results demonstrated important differences. When focusing on English-language media, we observe that debate-related news posts that focused on horserace and candidate personalities were significantly more likely to generate shares on social media than posts that did not focus on these aspects of debate reporting. Specifically, news posts that focused on horserace had an IRR of 1.720, suggesting a 72% increase in the number of expected shares than posts that do not focus on horserace ($p < .001$; CI = 1.437 – 2.059); in addition, posts that focused on candidate personalities are expected to receive 83% more shares ($p < .001$; CI = 1.349 – 2.488).

than posts that did not focus on candidate personalities. On the other hand, we find that social media posts that focus on issues (IRR = .116, CI = .116 – .015) have a decreased chance of receiving shares across social media (see Model 1 in Table 2).

Table 2. Debate News-Sharing Predictions on English Language Broadcasters.

	Model 1: Main Effects (IRR)	Model 2: Interaction effects (IRR)
Debate Reporting		
Issue Coverage	.116* (.116–.015)	.102* (.021–.843)
Strategy	.826* (.721–.958)	.375*** (.272–.518)
Horserace	1.720*** (1.437–2.059)	1.018 (.680–1.525)
Candidate Personality	1.832*** (1.349–2.488)	2.499*** (1.645–3.796)
Negative Posts	.924 (.727–1.175)	1.031 (.684–1.554)
Candidate Attacks	1.225 (.967–1.553)	.931 (.603–1.438)
SSN Platform: X/Twitter	.475*** (.398–.565)	.303*** (.236–.389)
Cross-platform Interactions		
Issue X Twitter		1.161 (.787–1.714)
Strategy X Twitter		2.636*** (1.838–3.780)
Horserace X Twitter		1.805** (1.154–2.823)
Candidate Personality X Twitter		.711(.377–1.342)
Negative Posts X Twitter		.912 (.545–1.525)
Candidate Attacks X Twitter		1.517 (.896–2.568)
News Broadcasters		
NBC News	1.103(.946–1.293)	1.063(.905–1.249)
ABC News	.827* (.687–.994)	.826*(.686–.994)
CNN	2.337*** (1.438–3.797)	3.158*** (1.895–5.263)
<i>MSNBC</i> ¹		
Constant	94.738*** (73.543– 122.041)	137.029*** (101.580– 184.848)
N	1,004	1,004
Log-likelihood	–5473.758	–10861.909
Dispersion parameter	1.566	1.630
AIC	11021.515	21799.294

Note. Cell entries are IRRs (incidence rate ratios) with confidence intervals in brackets. Values < 1 indicate a negative effect; values > 1 indicate a positive effect. AIC: Akaike information criterion. ¹MSNBC treated as a reference category. Additional controls include multimedia features within the news post, the topic of the news post, and the debate night.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Turning the focus to data for Spanish language broadcasters, we observe a different pattern. Contrary to news-sharing patterns on English media, debate-related posts that focused on horserace and candidate attacks received significantly less shares on Spanish-language broadcasting SNS than posts that did not focus on these frames. Specifically, we expect that news posts that focus on horserace receive 51% less shares than posts that do not focus on this aspect of debate coverage ($p < .001$; CI = .368–.656),

while news posts that focus on candidate attacks are expected to receive 50% less shares on Spanish-language broadcasters than posts that do not focus on candidate attacks ($p < .01$; CI = .413–.886). In addition, we observe that debate-related posts that report on candidate strategy are also 40% less likely to be shared than posts that did not report on strategy ($p < .001$; CI = .512–.759; see model 1 in Table 3).

Table 3. Debate News-Sharing Predictions Across Spanish Language Broadcasters.

	Model 1: Main Effects (IRR)	Model 2: Interaction Effects (IRR)
Debate Reporting		
Issue Coverage	1.129 (.637–2.003)	1.429 (.752–2.715)
Strategy	.632*** (.512–.759)	.431*** (.298–.623)
Horserace	.491*** (.368–.656)	.699 (.390–1.253)
Candidate Personality	1.147 (.922–1.427)	.980 (.656–1.464)
Negative Posts	.971 (.739–1.276)	.893 (.531–1.503)
Candidate Attacks	.505** (.413–.886)	.555 (.286–1.075)
SSN Platform: X/Twitter	.298*** (.248–.359)	.262*** (.202–.339)
Cross-platform Interactions		
Issue X Twitter		.683 (.402–1.163)
Strategy X Twitter		1.611* (1.041–2.494)
Horserace X Twitter		.681 (.348–1.332)
Candidate Personality X Twitter		1.243 (.772–2.001)
Negative Posts X Twitter		1.168 (.634–2.152)
Candidate Attacks X Twitter		1.135 (.501–2.571)
News Broadcasters		
Telemundo	.493*** (.402–.606)	.489*** (.397–.602)
Univision ¹		
Constant	53.242*** (37.875–74.843)	57.221*** (39.614–82.654)
N	709	709
Log-likelihood	–2718.130	–2721.897
Dispersion parameter	1.648	1.647
AIC	5482.259	5483.794

Note. Cell entries are IRRs (incidence rate ratios) with confidence intervals in brackets. Values < 1 indicate a negative effect; values > 1 indicate a positive effect. AIC: Akaike information criterion. Additional controls include multimedia features within the news post, the topic of the news post, and the debate night.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Cross Platform Differences in Sharing Behavior

Our results provide additional nuances when we differentiate between social media platforms to address our second research question (RQ2), which explores differences in sharing behaviors between Facebook and X/Twitter.

As expected, we observe significant interaction effects for both English and Spanish language broadcasters, suggesting that the type of social media platform might moderate user sharing of debate posts that contain different frames (model 2 on Tables 2 and 3). For English language broadcasters, news posts that focus on strategy and horserace frames perform better in terms of shareability on X/Twitter than posts that do not focus on candidate personalities. In other terms, debate-related posts that emphasize strategy are more than twice as likely to be shared on X/Twitter (IRR = 2.636; CI = 1.838 – 3.780), while posts that focus on horse race are shared 80% more on X/Twitter (IRR = 1.805, CI = 1.154 – 2.823).

Similar to English language media, we find significant interaction effects for posts that focus on strategy in the Spanish language media model. Debate-related news posts that focus on strategy perform 60% better on X/Twitter than on Facebook (IRR=1.611, CI = 1.041 – 2.494).

Discussion and Conclusion

This is one of the few studies that has examined social media news sharing across Spanish- and English-language media, moving beyond the idea of Hispanic media representing a niche or ethnic media system of its own but becoming important sources of information during political debates. In this study, we consider potential disparities between audience sharing behavior on English and Spanish language broadcasters during political debates. Our findings paint a nuanced picture of the mechanisms that drive cross-media differences in news sharing. In examining why these differences might occur, we found that English and Spanish broadcasters' audiences do not engage equally with strategic, horserace, and negative reporting of electoral campaigns.

Three important findings emerged from this study. First, our findings contradict previous assumptions that justify the predominance of strategic and horserace framing and negativity with audience logic (Cushion & Thomas, 2018). Indeed, we find that audiences on English-language broadcasters are more likely to share debate-related news posts that focus on the horserace aspects of the debates and on candidate personalities, supporting the thesis for audience demand for this type of election news coverage. Yet, our findings suggest that this pattern does not hold true when examining the sharing of election news on U.S. Spanish-language broadcasters' social media platforms. Rather, audiences of Spanish-language broadcasters are less likely to share debate-related posts that focus on strategy, horserace, and candidate attacks, underlining the fact that strategic game reporting and negativity do not engage Spanish media audiences with election news and electoral processes to the same extent as English-language audiences (Iyengar et al., 2004; Trussler & Soroka, 2014).

Despite limited evidence of audience demand for strategic game framing across media serving different sociocultural audiences, we find significant similarities in how English- and Spanish-language broadcasters report election news on social media. In line with previous studies (Hale, Olsen, & Fowler, 2009), our content analysis suggests that strategy coverage was the predominant frame used to report on the 2020 political debates across both English and Spanish broadcasters' social networking sites. These data suggest that, despite the availability of user analytics that provide more nuanced observations of audience preferences, old habits persist as we confirm a "pan-journalist" approach to covering campaigns and elections" (Hale et al., 2009, p. 43) in the United States, which focuses on procedural aspects of elections,

giving precedence to candidates' motives and strategies used for winning elections (Aalberg et al., 2012). Our findings support previous research that reveals the complex dynamic of Hispanic media in the United States: Univision and Telemundo both operate as Spanish-language networks under the same political system and adopt similar corporate structures as their English-language counterparts. Yet, the Spanish-language media and its audience are socio-culturally different, and this study adds new insights into the complexity of news-sharing preferences across Spanish language audiences.

The third important lesson relates to the role of platform affordances, as our data provide additional nuances about how news audiences display different behavioral patterns across social media platforms. Similar to previous studies (Valenzuela et al., 2017), we found that across English and Spanish language news broadcasters, the average number of shares is significantly higher for Facebook than for X/Twitter and that news frames explain differences in sharing behavior across Facebook and X/Twitter. However, and perhaps most importantly, within both types of media samples, we find crucial similarities in that social media posts that focused on strategic game reporting were more likely to be shared on X/Twitter than on Facebook. These findings suggest that due to the lack of anonymity, Facebook might be a more important platform where ethnic and social identities matter and create social constraints that impact news sharing (Leonardi, 2014).

Together, these results highlight an inadequate understanding of what drives the news shareworthiness of Hispanic audiences on social media—resulting from our long tradition of researching White audiences in the United States that drove theory-building in political journalism. Contrary to expectations, we find substantial evidence to support the “news gap” hypothesis (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Masullo et al., 2022) between news producers and social media news consumers for Spanish language broadcasters. While Spanish news producers implement strategies that connect more directly with their audiences (Cárdenas et al., 2021) and pay close attention to their audiences' preferences when covering issues in general (Branton & Dunaway, 2008), they are more likely to stick to the general election coverage script found in the English language media, although their audiences are less likely to engage with this type of coverage.

Based on the findings of this study, we argue that sociocultural socialization and identity might be a major driver not only of news selection and frame interpretation (Bigman et al., 2019), but also of news-sharing behavior of election news on social media. Spanish language media audiences as a bilingual minority group in the United States use Spanish media to connect with their communities; hence, they may be more inclined to share issue-based news stories that highlight policy implications for Latino communities (e.g., healthcare, education, and immigration reform). For instance, one of the most shared Facebook posts from Spanish media (Noticias Telemundo, 2019a) focused on health care and discussed Democratic candidates' reactions to Donald Trump's claim that health care coverage should not include undocumented immigrants. Another Spanish media post with the second highest rate of shares quoted former vice president Joe Biden saying, “The first thing I would do is reunite families separated at the border” (Noticias Telemundo, 2019b).

These data support previous research suggesting that social media audiences are more likely to share issues-based news posts due to the anticipated perceptions of their peers and community on social networking sites (Choi, 2016).

The results of this study take another dimension if we adopt Lane et al. (2022) conceptualization of ethnicity and race not simply as demographic variables, but as “marker of social identity that serves as the basis for the social construction of power differences between dominant and subordinate groups” (p. 80). While research suggests that Hispanics may be less likely than non-Hispanic White users to engage in explicit political expression on social media (Wang, 2022), this does not necessarily mean that they lack political influence. Instead, their political engagement may take alternative forms, such as sharing culturally resonant news stories, mobilizing around issues central to their communities or participating in Spanish-language news discussions that frame political topics in ways that feel relevant to their lived experiences.

Spanish-language news organizations can play a crucial role in this process by providing election content tailored to Latino audiences that fosters political learning and encourages participation in civic discussions beyond their linguistic contribution. In other words, what is clear from our data is that Spanish-language media should emphasize constructive or community-focused narratives rather than the conflict-driven, horserace-style reporting that is more common in mainstream English-language outlets, because it is what their audiences need and want and what builds and sustains the pan-ethnic community. This difference in framing influences sharing behaviors, as content that resonates with group identity and promotes community engagement is more likely to be circulated.

One key limitation of this study is the inability to directly measure the individual demographics and motivations of the audiences engaging with news posts. Obviously, such racial and ethnic differences in news engagement patterns could be explored further in controlled experimental environments. While our data do not provide a clear indication of the individual ethnic or racial composition of the audiences analyzed in this study, our conclusions are justified by Nielsen data that suggest that Univision and Telemundo are the leading primetime media sources for all U.S. Hispanics, regardless of language. While our approach uses the language of the media outlet as a proxy for sociocultural audience differences, this method does not account for the diversity among English- and Spanish-language media consumers. The simplistic framing of Latinos as a monolithic ethnoracial group fails to represent intragroup tensions and diversity of interests and belief systems (Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2020); hence, future studies should consider these shortcomings. Additionally, the reliance on social media platform data presents challenges in fully capturing the complexities of user behavior, given the influence of algorithms and platform affordances. Exploring other digital platforms beyond Facebook and X/Twitter could provide a more comprehensive picture of news dissemination in bilingual and bicultural media spaces.

Because news sharing is an indicator of audience engagement with political campaigns and wider political behavior, the examination of racial and ethnic differences offers a way forward in understanding how structural differences in society may shape online participation during political debates. Televised debates represent focal points in electoral campaigns for engaging voters with the political process in a democracy, and they have been found to contribute to voter learning and persuasion. Indeed, news content is only one-way news producers can influence what people share on social media; other factors, such as platformization and algorithms, act as filters in the process. This study emphasizes the need for news media to consider not only social media affordances but also the sociocultural diversity of their audiences when strategizing their editorial decisions and journalistic routines for engaging their audiences.

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