TOWARDS AN INSTITUTIONAL NEWS LOGIC OF DIGITAL NATIVE NEWS MEDIA? A CASE STUDY OF BUZZFEED'S REPORTING DURING THE 2015 AND 2017 UK GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Informed by new institutional perspectives to debates about theorising media logic, this study asks whether a popular digital native media platform has, over time, conformed to a singular news logic associated with the norms and routines of legacy media. Drawing on a content analysis of BuzzFeed during the 2015 and 2017 UK general election campaigns, which included examining 399 news items and 1878 sources, we found a shift towards an editorial logic broadly reflected in legacy media reporting. In the 2017 election campaign there was more substantive policy reported, new specialist reporters employed, a greater reliance on institutional sources, particularly from established legacy media, and a sharper focus on the two main political parties. Overall, we argue that, as digital native media have evolved, become more popular and interconnected with legacy media, the norms and routines of their news reporting are not necessarily that distinguishable from a singular, institutional news media logic.

Digital native media are broadly known as media born in the digital age, but they have grown in size, scope and character since the 1990s. They have been characterised as "start-ups" or "pure players" (Bruno and Nielsen 2012, 11), since they have developed without "a more entrenched set of organisational structures, business practices, and professional norms" that define legacy media (Nielsen and Nicholls 2016, 11). Digital native media, nonetheless, have evolved into a diverse set of organisations over recent decades. According to Nielsen and Nicholls (2016), there are two waves of digital native media organisations. The first wave, launched in the 1990s, consisted of sites such as Salon, Slate, and Netzeitung or portals like MSN, Yahoo News, and t-online. They were connected to services including emails and search engines. Into the 2000s, the second wave of digital native media, such as the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed and Vice, were shaped not just by search engines, but by social media platforms, mobile phones and tablets. The technological features of these platforms influenced the editorial logic of these sites, pitching them in competition with some legacy media who had adapted their services for the new digital environment (Nielsen and Nicholls 2016). It also brought new editorial philosophies for digital media native media, with an overarching logic of delivering content at speed for audiences on mobile devices accessing news and information around the clock. Given the expansion of social media platforms in many Western countries, the reach of digital native media audiences also grew rapidly meaning their influence was far greater than in the first wave.

This study is interested in further exploring the media logic of digital native media by carrying out a systematic review of one of the most widely read and shared digital native media outlets – BuzzFeed – during the 2015 and 2017 UK general election campaigns. This excludes many digital native sites that focus on subjects such as sports, travel, health or technology. After all, since 2015, more digital native media platforms have been launched, and with competition increasing, BuzzFeed's audience size has reduced in some countries (Williams 2017). The market fluctuations of BuzzFeed's success has also influenced the resources shaping its journalism. As BuzzFeed became more popular around the world, different countries invested in its newsgathering and recruited more staff (Ingram 2018). In doing so, the editorial character of BuzzFeed may have changed in terms of the types of journalists it employs, its reporting practices and news agenda. In this study, we are interested in

understanding if these changes have influenced the news media logic of BuzzFeed over time, and to more broadly consider whether our case study reflects a broader shift in the logic of digital native media.

Media logic is a concept that has long been used to help convey the character, format and style of different media (Altheide and Snow 1979). It has become more widely used to interpret the nature of coverage in specific areas, such as reporting politics, religion, marketing or legal cases. In making sense of content in isolation, the logic of editorial decisions is understood according to influences such as advertising and ownership pressures, or by their format and stylistic standards, which include time and special limitations. In recent years, the presence of a unifying *news media logic* has been debated, and the professional norms and conventions of journalism have been theorised in order to consider whether an underlying logic is shaping different news media (Asp 2014; Esser 2013). We draw on new institutional perspectives in these debates (Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999; Ryfe 2006a; Ryfe 2006b;), including Asp (2014) who argues that over time news media adopt similar characteristics that broadly represent a singular news media logic. Asp's (2014) analysis largely centred on the logic of legacy news media, but his conclusion posed the question: "Will the emergence of new digital media in the age of the internet imply the end of news media logic as an institution, a de-institutionalization?" (Asp 2014, 266). Three scenarios were offered: "the end of the news media logic institution; a situation of status quo (some constraints of the old media disappear, whereas some new constraints of the new media emerge); and a "stronger and refined" news media logic (the new media impose new constraints and new forms of dependencies)" (Asp 2014, 266).

Our study will empirically identify which scenario is most accurate by examining the institutional logic shaping BuzFeed's election news reporting over time. We chose to study election reporting because of a relatively well-established news media logic that has long guided the practices and conventions of campaign reporting (Blumler and McQuail 1968; Crouse 1973; Semetko et al. 1991). We develop an analytical framework that allows us to compare whether BuzzFeed institutionally conformed to a more general news media logic evident in legacy media. In doing so, we theorise how the broad, systemic influence of news media logic polices the boundaries of journalism, which, in the case of BuzzFeed, led to more serious and analytical election reporting.

Understanding institutional news logic and digital native media

Institutionalist approaches to studying news media date back decades. Cook (1998) and Sparrow (1999), in particular, are widely credited with leading debates about the extent to which news content is shaped by institutional practices. They drew on new institutional theories of the 1970s and 1980s, which developed more sophisticated understanding of how institutional power operates to perpetuate macro influences at a micro level. Applying this to US news media organisations, Cook (1998) and Sparrow (1999) have put forward the argument that journalism is a product of institutional logic, a reinforcement of long-held values of routines and practices – from objectivity to neutrality - that regulate the behaviour of journalistic editorial judgements. Ryfe (2006a), by contrast, has argued institutional influence is more apparent in political than economic forces. He suggested journalists are embedded in a political culture that policies the boundaries of their journalistic behaviour. Debates continue about identifying precisely which actors and structures wield most institutional power (Ryfe 2006b). Of interest in this study is understanding how quickly and in what ways institutional change occurs at a popular digital native news outlet, such as BuzzFeed.

Asp (2014), in this respect, has argued that news media are driven by an institutional logic that broadly shapes a similar approach to journalism. In his words, "As an institution, news media logic works as a constraint on action since its values and rules reduce uncertainty

and provide an overall structure that shapes the behaviour of both the news organizations and individual news journalists" (Asp 2014, 259). In other words, there is a generally shared understanding of how journalism should be practiced, which most news media and journalists subscribe to over time. Over the course of the twentieth century, he claimed these norms and professional standards evolved and became institutionalised across news media organisations, and their influence grew to produce "a global and coherent news media logic" (Asp 2014, 265). Once established and institutionalised, Asp (2014) argued that news media logic is self-perpetuating because it reflects shared economic, political and cultural factors that may be temporarily resisted in some media outlets or countries, but most will eventually succumb to its institutional reach and power. While Asp (2014) speculated about the possible influence that new online and social media will have in challenging and re-shaping the logic of news media, overall he concluded that the institutional strength of news media logic will prevail and maintain its global influence.

Our study is designed to empirically test the strength of this logic by way of a case study of BuzzFeed UK's reporting during the 2015 and 2017 election campaigns. After all, the rise of digital native news media offers a possible challenge to the institutional logic of news media. Media logic is related to the concept of mediatization and the ways journalists develop autonomy from politics and enforce their own editorial logic in the context of wider factors of influence such as commercialization, globalization, audience fragmentation, and media markets, which has become compounded in the digital sphere (Strömbäck 2008). These influences have been evident in studies examining news reporting, such as enhanced partisanship and personalization, or a reduction in policy coverage (Magin 2015). Our study of BuzzFeed examines these and other mediatization characteristics in election reporting, exploring the extent to which a media logic remains consistent or divergent over time. We explain how we measure media logic and the mediatization of politics over time in our research design but is important to first establish how a logic is shaped and reinforced in journalistic practice.

In understanding media logic, recent debates about journalistic boundaries offer a way of interpreting how the digital media intersects with but also remains distinctive from legacy media. Carlson and Lewis' (2016) edited collection demonstrate how definitions of journalism by journalists produce boundaries that sometimes challenge, reinforce or maintain journalistic standards, which influence editorial judgements and news agendas (Carlson and Lewis 2016). So, for example, Singer (2016) argued professional norms have been rethought by the emergence of blogging, entrepreneurial journalism and social media. The second wave of digital native media, in this respect, have played a role in shifting the boundaries of legacy media outlets as professional journalists now routinely write, research and share news in ways that was once the preserve of bloggers. According to Carlson (2017), this boundary shifting relates to journalism authority being defined. Digital native media, in this respect, have exploited new technologies, delegitimising the journalistic credentials of many legacy media, casting doubt of their role as arbiters of knowledge and 'truth'. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, where journalists are viewed as agents of change, resisting, sustaining or transforming how they practice journalism, more generally scholars have explored the shifting boundaries of journalism in the digital age.

Since BuzzFeed is a relatively new agent in the journalistic field, a few studies have recently explored whether they have conformed to or resisted the boundaries of how legacy media ordinarily report news (Tandoc and Jenkins 2017, Stringer 2018, Tandoc 2018). Tandoc and Jenkins (2017), for example, analysed how traditional print media wrote about BuzzFeed, discovering that over time they became legitimatised by adhering to commercial demands and developing in-depth reporting and commentary. Similarly, drawing on interviews with 14 BuzzFeed staff, Stringer's (2018, 1998) study concluded that the site's "simultaneous desire to

be recognised as legitimate by peers has led to emphasis on traditional journalistic norms and practices". He largely accounted for this by BuzzFeed UK hiring more experienced journalists and investing in hard news. Tandoc's (2018) comparative content analysis of BuzzFeed in the US and the *New York Times* further suggested that BuzzFeed largely conforms to the conventions of legacy media.

Wu's (2016) systematic analysis of US BuzzFeed news between 2006 and 2015 also supports evidence of a harder news agenda being pursued over time, with a greater reliance on official sources. Nevertheless, both studies identified several distinctive characteristics. Tandoc (2018), for example, found that, compared to the *New York Times*, BuzzFeed produced a high number of social issues stories, embraced a more positive news agenda and relied to a greater extent on citizen sources. Wu (2016) also highlighted the high volume of citizen opinion, largely sourced from social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Painter et al's (2018) comparative study of digital native and legacy revealed similarities in the extent and nature of climate change coverage. But they crucially discovered differences between digital native news media. So, for example, whereas the *Huffington Post* broadly followed the agenda of legacy media, BuzzFeed defined itself as distinctive from outlets such as *The Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*. Overall, while comparative studies of BuzzFeed news have broadly pointed towards a shared news media logic in digital native news media and legacy news reporting, there are distinctive editorial features between and within them.

Interpreting the media logic of election reporting: A case study of BuzzFeed and institutional logic

In order to explore the news media logic of BuzzFeed UK, we examined its reporting during two general election campaigns (2015 and 2017). Election campaigns represent an important moment in journalism and democracy, since the news media play a key role in raising public knowledge and engagement (Blumler and McQuail 1968). Over the course of the twentieth century, journalists established a set of relatively well-known practices and conventions during election time. A voluminous literature about the logic of election reporting has grown over the last twenty to thirty years in journalism studies (Cushion and Thomas 2018). While there are differences cross-nationally and between media platforms in the new digital environment, studies have long shown that print and broadcast media have broadly followed a similar logic when reporting election campaigns (Crouse 1973; Semetko et al. 1991). Above all, a longstanding critique has been the emphasis on the mainstream media focussing on the 'horse race' between political parties and the 'process' of politics, such as campaign strategies (Semetko et al. 1991; Strömbäck 2008; Cushion and Thomas 2018). The institutional logic of legacy media has long been committed to reporting policy issues, although market competition has led to more trivial and superficial coverage of campaigns. Since BuzzFeed began life as a relatively light supplier of news and information, our analysis will assess whether they have embraced more policy coverage (indicating an institutional logic) or pursued an agenda that largely focuses on the processes of the campaign. There are also many discrete elements that make up a legacy media logic at election time, which more specifically evaluate the type of coverage and how well it serves citizens before they cast a vote. We focus on three features that are most relevant for this study in order to assess how far a legacy media logic of BuzzFeed is evident over time. First, the balance between interpretive and comment based reporting, which has shifted in recent years towards relying to a greater extent on opinions from reporters rather than supplying facts and figures in coverage (Hopmann and Strömbäck 2010). Our analysis will establish whether it has also shifted in line with legacy media towards more comment-based coverage or adapted a more fact driven approach to reporting. Second, during election campaigns (and outside them too), research has long found journalists rely heavily on institutional sources to inform coverage. The media logic of legacy

media is to prominently draw on 'official' sources, such as government officials, politicians, the media, police, security services, think thanks and academics. Our analysis will examine the overall selection of actors informing coverage and establish whether BuzzFeed conforms to this logic or has a more diverse selection of sources. Third, legacy media has long followed what is known as the objectivity norm: balancing the voices of the mainstream candidates and political parties evenly over the campaign. Our analysis will assess whether BuzzFeed objectively constructed party-political sources of the UK's main two political parties or chose to adopt a more partisan approach following other digital native sites, such as Brietbart News.

In understanding the media logic of reporting or the mediatization of politics, scholars have often drawn on case studies of election reporting as a way of measuring the autonomy of journalists and their ability to pursue a media over a political logic. So, for example, the type of practices and conventions scholars have most often used to interpret a media superseding a political logic include privileging journalists over political sources, signalling the strength of their autonomy from external influences; reporting process over policy issues, which helps illustrate whether a serious or light-heartened agenda is pursued; the degree of factual or comment-based coverage, reflecting how far journalists' interpret events and issues; and the type of journalist employed by news organisations to cover campaigns (Strömbäck 2008). Taken together, these broadly represent a longstanding way that scholars have explored the norms and routines of legacy media during election campaigns (Blumler and McQuail 1968 Crouse 1973; Semetko et al. 1991; Cushion and Thomas 2018). In our analysis, we use them as a way of *representing institutional practices of legacy media during election campaigns.*

Of course, this paints a broad institutional picture of election reporting – a generally conceived legacy media logic – which should not escape criticism. As mediatization of politics scholars have acknowledged, there are variations between media systems about the extent to which competing media conform to or deviate from these practices. As longitudinal studies have established, time mainstream news coverage has, for example, become more journalist centred (Steele and Barnhurst 1996) and interpretive (Fink and Schudson 2013) in coverage of politics and public affairs. While BuzzFeed's media logic is also in flux, by analysing coverage over time our aim is to under whether its direction of travel is distinctive from or consistent with the logic of legacy media.

We acknowledge BuzzFeed does not represent all digital native news media, but it does constitute a leading "International for-profit player" (Nielsen and Nicholls 2016, 36) in the market and, in our view, merits being used as a case study. We also acknowledge that measuring institutional change would be more illuminating if we could develop a comparative study of a representative mix of digital native news media outlets cross-nationally. But, in our view, single case studies can contribute to broader debates about whether any institutional shifts reflect a wider media logic.

We are not alone in relying on one media organisation to examine institutional changes in news reporting. Wahl Jorgensen at al (2017), for example, drew solely on a content analysis study over time to explore institutional changes in BBC news coverage. Specifically, it examined whether the BBC had changed its interpretation of impartiality after new editorial guidelines were put into place by systematically looking at source selection in 2007 and 2012. Similarly, Williams, Wardle and Wahl-Jorgensen (2010) focussed exclusively on the role of user generated content at the BBC to examine how new technology was shaping institutional changes in how news interacts with audience. As they argued: "In the main journalists and editors see material from the audience as just another news source, a formulation which is perpetuated by the institutional frameworks set up to elicit and process audience material as well as the content of the corporation's UGC training" (Williams, Wardle and Wahl-Jorgensen 2010, 85). Likewise, Mattheson (2004) drew on a case study of *The Guardian* to examine the role of weblogs. In doing so, he argued his study represented an intervention that amounted to

a "rearticulation in this institutional product [weblogs] of the relation between journalists and users, of the claim to authority made in the news text and of the news text as product, provides historians of both journalism and new media with a case study of the adaptation of journalism to new contexts" (Mattheson 2004, 443).

Beyond the BBC, Shin (2014) examined a Korean newsroom to explore broader questions about boundary making in journalism. In this respect, a journalistic logic was used to understand a single media case study that contributed to debates about the professional authority of mainstream journalists as new participatory practices challenge the status quo. The study most closely resembled our approach is Wu's (2016) content analysis study of BuzzFeed in the US over eight years. She found "The findings correspond with what institutionalism theory has suggested regarding organizational level analysis". However, she added, "it takes more than a single study to determine whether the adoption of organizational forms is intentional. This also reflects the inherent limitations of content analysis: the connections between results and interpretation are speculative and implied by a correlation suggested in the literature" (Wu 2016, 144). We acknowledge the limitations inherent in relying on a single case study to examine institutional change and the influences that shape them. But by carrying out a case study about its editorial direction during election coverage over time in the UK, we hope to encourage further single case study or cross-national comparative research about digital native media generally and BuzzFeed reporting specifically.

Our research questions are:

How different was BuzzFeed UK's news agenda, source selection and party-political balance in coverage of the UK 2017 general election campaign compared to 2015?

Is BuzzFeed UK conforming to an institutional news media logic in its reporting from the 2015 to 2017 general election campaigns?

Method and sample
The study drew on a content analysis of BuzzFeed UK news during the 2015 and 2017 UK general election campaigns. The sample was generated by analysing all BuzzFeed output about the campaigns (29/03/15 - 6/5/15 and 2/5/17 – 8/6/17)[1]. A few stories mentioning the election only in passing were discarded. In total, 399 stories were examined (235 for 2015 and 164 for 2017), with each item analysed according to strict criteria about the type of content, sources and party political balance. The study largely focussed on assessing the content of BuzzFeed's news, rather than any of its interactive or unique platform features, because we wanted to be able to compare how far a digital native media site was conforming legacy media (which do not have the same interactive capabilities). So, for example, BuzzFeed's long form approach to reporting or stylistic attempt to encourage readers to share material across social media platforms ('clickbait') was not part of our comparative analytical framework. We would recommend future studies should pay closer empirical scrutiny to how digital native media use these and other features in order to better theorise news media logic.

Taken together, the content analysis variables were designed to consider how far an institutional news media logic can be traced in election reporting over time. If, for example, we see *a shift towards more serious and fact-driven coverage, a focus on parties' campaign events and policy analysis, the use of specialist reporters and a greater reliance on institutional sources then we can conclude that BuzzFeed appears to be conforming to an institutional news media logic*. We used a number of variables to understand BuzzFeed's election coverage over time. We firstly assessed whether the reporting tone was predominantly lightweight/humorous

or more serious. Operationally, we judged whether the dominant frame of each article was intended to elicit more of a humorous response than adopting a more serious approach. In practice, such decision-making was relatively clear cut. So, for example, while some items quite clearly took a humorous approach ("People think Jeremy Corbyn's aide looks a lot like Tom Cruise"), others were focused on the substance of the political contest ("These SNP Members Have Made An Official Complaint About Their Local SNP MP"). In order to assess whether coverage was fact or comment-driven, we considered the extent to which items were informed by opinions rather descriptive accounts of events. So, for example, in an item entitled "Theresa May Is Leaving Thatcherism Behind To Win The British Political Centre Ground", there was an evaluative judgement about May's manifesto promises. By contrast, an item entitled "Scottish Labour Has Suspended Nine Councillors For Doing A Deal With The Tories" was largely fact-driven and contained little accompanying commentary.

We then determined whether the article's chief (but again, not necessarily exclusive) focus was on the process of the election or about a party's policy plans. In practice, once again, such decisions were mostly straightforward. So, for example, an item entitled "A Tory Candidate, His Aide, And An Official Have Been Charged Over 2015 Election Expenses" was clearly process driven because it contained no policy details whatsoever. But in an item entitled "Theresa May Says She'll Tear Up Human Rights Laws If They Stop Her Catching Terrorists", the focus was almost exclusively about policy. Where items were deemed to be mainly about process, we also determined the main focus of such non-policy reporting. While "Gaffe" describes the mishaps involving candidates, "Scandal" refers to more serious issues threatening the integrity of a personality or party. "Campaign focussed" concerns campaign events including, for example, rallies and walkabouts. "Political personality" was coded when the non-policy focus was generally on one or more candidate or political figure, and "Human interest" was chosen for a focus on non-political social actors. Finally, where the focus was on the way that media (specifically or more broadly) covered the election, we coded this as "media coverage".

In addition to determining which reporters were responsible for each item, if their specialism was not mentioned in their article, we looked for these through desk research (examining, for example, Twitter feeds, LinkedIn profiles and internet archives). This enabled us to consider how far specialist journalists were employed during the two campaigns. In order to assess the balance of election coverage, we examined the predominant party-political focus of each item. Sometimes, this was not easily determined because of a mix of central characters, policies or themes. Other times, there was no real party involvement - for example, "Here's what young people actually want from the 2017 General Election" or "Is Your MP A Night Owl Or Early Bird?". All such examples were coded as "unclear". To further explore how coverage was constructed, every source contribution was examined and categorised according to social actor type. Once again, where this was not clear from the article, desk research was carried out to identify details of the source. Approximately 10% of the sample was subject to an intercoder reliability test using Cohen's Kappa coefficient (see Appendix A for full results). Overall, a high level agreement was recorded in almost all units of measurement.

How did BuzzFeed cover the election campaigns in 2015 and 2017?
Our review of academic studies and press commentary about BuzzFeed suggested that the site has evolved from an entertainment platform to one that produces more serious journalism. Our study of election reporting between 2015 and 2017 supports these claims. Although the number of BuzzFeed election stories fell from 235 in 2015 to 164 in 2017, the content of news became more serious. We assessed whether a story could be described as light-heartened or trivial in content and, as Table 1 shows, the proportion of these types of items fell by over a third.

Table 1. Tone of BuzzFeed election reporting

	2015			2017		
	Number of stories	**%**		**Number of stories**	**%**	**% change from 2015 to 2017**
Light-hearted content	62	**26.4**		13	**7.9**	**-18.5**
Serious content	173	**73.6**		151	**92.1**	**+18.5**
Total	235	**100.0**		164	**100.0**	

In 2015, many election stories (around 1 in 4) clearly focused on the lighter elements of the campaign. Typical examples included "I Was Fed A Solero By The Leader Of The Scottish Conservatives", "David Cameron Says He's Learned 'Frozen' Off By Heart" and "This Woman Has Tattooed Alex Salmond's Face On Her Leg". In 2017, such light-hearted stories were much less prominent, amounting to around only 1 in 12 election stories. To explore election coverage further, we isolated all non-light-hearted news to assess whether more hard news items were predominantly comment-based or factually driven. Table 2 shows that within more serious stories, there was less factual reporting.

Table 2: Fact or comment in hard news BuzzFeed election items

	2015			2017		
	Number of stories	**%**		**Number of stories**	**%**	**% change from 2015 to 2017**
Comment	62	**35.8**		61	**40.4**	**+4.6**
Fact	111	**64.2**		90	**59.6**	**-4.6**
Total	173	**100.0**		151	**100.0**	

This finding might be explained by the drop in light-hearted stories, which tend to be more factual in content, since they mostly involve no accompanying commentary, evaluation, speculation or interpretation. Overall, there is a more fact than comment-based approach to BuzzFeed's election reporting.

When we examined the overall focus of election items, a more discernible shift from process type news to more policy-based reporting was evident. Operationally, this examined whether a BuzzFeed item concentrated more on policy issues, or the events and strategies associated with the campaign itself. By this measure, BuzzFeed's agenda became more substantive and issue-focused, as Table 3 shows that the proportion of policy-driven news nearly tripled between the two elections (from 11.1% to 28.7%).

Table 3: Policy or process in BuzzFeed election news

	2015			2017		
	Number of stories	**%**		**Number of stories**	**%**	**% change from 2015 to 2017**
Policy	26	**11.1**		47	**28.7**	**+17.6**
Non-policy	209	**88.9**		117	**71.3**	**-17.6**
Total	235	**100.0**		164	**100.0**	

The shift towards a more serious election agenda is further evidenced by the proportion of stories that included policy issues. Some of the more obvious policy stories in 2017 included, for example, "Here's Why The Tory Manifesto Could Be Bad News For Universities", "This Is What Political Parties Are Promising Britain's Black And Asian Voters" and "UKIP wants immigrants to pass values test". Table 4 reveals that the number of stories mentioning policy

increased, with a clear majority – 60.3% - including more substantive issues in 2017 compared to 40.4% in 2015.

Table 4. Policy mentions within BuzzFeed election news

	2015			2017		
	Number of stories	**%**		**Number of stories**	**%**	**% change from 2015 to 2017**
Mentioning policy	95	**40.4**		99	**60.3**	**+19.9**
Not mentioning policy	140	**59.6**		65	**39.7**	**-19.9**
Total	235	**100.0**		164	**100.0**	

According to several measures, our content analysis so far signals a clear increase in policy news, reflecting a more substantive and serious news agenda being pursued.

Since non-policy news accounted for a large portion of coverage, we further explored the changing character of BuzzFeed news by categorising this type of coverage in six ways: a political gaffe, such as a politician mis-speaking; a focus on the parties' campaign events or strategies; a human-interest angle, mostly involving a voter's attitude towards politics; the personality of a politician, notably the party leaders; a scandal involving a political actor; and, finally, media coverage, where news reporting from other outlets was analysed. Table 5 shows that, in both 2015 and 2017 campaigns, the main non-policy focus was on events within the campaign, and the daily cut and thrust of electioneering. This intensified considerably in 2017, with a shift from 28.2% to 50.0%.

Table 5. Focus within non-policy election news on BuzzFeed

	2015			2017		
	Number of stories	**%**		**Number of stories**	**%**	**% change from 2015 to 2017**
Gaffe	21	**10.0**		9	**7.7**	**-2.3**
Campaign focussed	59	**28.2**		58	**50.0**	**+21.8**
Human interest	21	**10.0**		4	**3.4**	**-6.6**
Political personality	51	**24.4**		13	**11.1**	**-13.3**
Scandal	13	**6.2**		14	**12.0**	**+5.8**
Media coverage	44	**21.1**		19	**16.3**	**-4.8**
Total	209	**100.0**		117	**100.0**	

However, what can also be concluded from Table 5 is that an emphasis on personalities has significantly reduced, from 24.4% in 2015 to 11.15% in 2017, along with a fall – from 10% to 3.4% - in human interest stories. In other words, BuzzFeed's election agenda centred to a far greater extent on the campaign, consistent with the agenda typically pursued by legacy broadcast and press media.

Findings thus far indicate that BuzzFeed has adopted a more serious and analytical agenda in election reporting in 2015 compared to 2017. Such a shift is only possible when the journalists involved have the requisite expertise to provide this more cerebral approach. In this respect, the staff of BuzzFeed journalists publishing election news stories across the two elections has shifted towards a greater political specialism. While some articles had more than one author, we quantified every author contribution to an election piece whether as lead, secondary or sole author (see Table 6).

Table 6. Contributors of election news on BuzzFeed*

	2015			2017		
	Election stories	%		Election stories	%	% change from 2015 to 2017
Siraj Datoo	58	24.7		-	-	-24.7
Jamie Ross	3	1.3		19	11.6	+10.3
Jim Waterson	31	13.2		45	27.4	+14.2
Alan White	10	4.3		1	0.6	-3.7
Mark Di Stefano	7	3.0		-	-	-3.0
Patrick Smith	5	2.1		6	3.7	+1.6
Tom Phillips	3	1.3		12	7.3	+6.0
Alex Spence	-	-		21	12.8	+12.8
Rose Troup Buchanan	-	-		12	7.5	+7.5
Hannah Al-Othman	-	-		10	6.1	+6.1
Matthew Champion	-	-		10	6.1	+6.1
Others	118	50.2		38	23.2	-27.0
Total	235	100.0		164	100.0	

This table concentrates on those journalists that mainly contributed to BuzzFeed's election coverage in 2017. A total of 28 journalists contributed to coverage in 2015.

In 2015, the largest contributors of election news were Jim Waterson, Siraj Datoo and Jamie Ross. All three self-identified as political reporters and, in total, they contributed just over half of all election articles (54.1%), with no one contributing more than 4.3% of articles. In 2017, the spread of political reporting was notably wider. Excluding Siraj Datoo (who moved to a different media organisation), Waterson, as Political Editor, contributed the most articles (27.7%). Since 2015, a number of correspondents were recruited, all of whom contributed to 2017 election campaign coverage: Alex Spence (hired from *Politico*); Rose Troup Buchanan (hired from *The Independent*); Patrick Smith (former editor of The *Mediabriefing*); Hannah Al-Othman (hired from the *Mail Online*) and Mathew Champion (also from *The Independent*). Overall, BuzzFeed's political journalism has clearly been strengthened post-2015, and these resources contributed to enhancing the analytical depth of reporting during the 2017 election campaign.

It was not just the personnel at BuzzFeed that had changed between 2015 and 2017. Our study shows its news practices also had, with a shift in its reliance on different types of journalistic sources used to inform coverage as well as other types of actors. Of the 1878 sources examined, there was a shift towards sourcing party political actors (from 32.7% in 2015 to 45% in 2017) and a reduction in citizens' voices (from 37.9% to 30.1%). The proportion of other types of sources, such as academics and charities, remained broadly the same (from 9.8% in 2015 to 9.6% in 2017). While there was a small drop in the use of journalistic sources from 19.8% in 2015 to 15.1% in 2017, there was a greater reliance on contributions from legacy media.

As previously acknowledged, a main characteristic of digital native media is curating other media, drawing on online and social media platforms as sources for coverage. We examined how far this was the case in BuzzFeed's election reporting by quantifying the type of journalistic sources featured across different media platforms, such as an embedded tweet, film or sound recorded interview, or in a written format. Table 7 shows that during the 2015 campaign media sources were spread across a range of mainstream media and more alternative media, including references to previous BuzzFeed coverage. In 2017, by contrast, there was a noticeable shift in reliance towards broadcast and print media (from 55.8% to 74.7%). Put

another way, almost three quarters of media sources were drawn from legacy broadcast and print media sources in 2017, representing more institutionally powerful institutions than, say, internet sources or journalists without affiliations.

Table 7. Range of journalistic sources within election news on BuzzFeed

Journalistic sources mentioned	2015			2017		
	Number of times quoted	%		Number of times quoted	%	% change from 2015 to 2017
Broadcast	43	**22.0**		49	**36.6**	**+14.6**
Print	66	**33.8**		51	**38.1**	**+4.3**
BuzzFeed	39	**20.0**		5	**3.7**	**-16.3**
Other new media	11	**5.6**		12	**9.0**	**+3.4**
Other journalists	17	**8.7**		11	**8.2**	**-0.5**
Journalist -no obvious affiliation	15	**7.7**		6	**4.5**	**-3.2**
Other internet source	4	**2.1**		-	**-**	**-2.1**
Total	195	**100.0**		134	**100.0**	

Another measure of an enhanced institutionalization of BuzzFeed's coverage was revealed by our comparative analysis of sources (excluding journalistic, party political or citizen sources). As Table 8 shows, the entertainment industry provided most sources in 2015. In 2017, however, far more voices were drawn from institutional sources – a shift from 4.2% to 20.7% - such as the civil service, Parliament and various Committees, or from the worlds of law and academia.

Table 8. Range of sources within election news on BuzzFeed (excluding politicians or citizens)

	2015			2017		
	Number of times quoted	%		Number of times quoted	%	% change from 2015 to 2017
Actors/musicians/ comedians /entertainers	26	**27.4**		3	**3.4**	**-24.0**
Activists	12	**12.6**		10	**11.5**	**-1.1**
Civil service/ Parliamentary Source or Committee	4	**4.2**		18	**20.7**	**+16.5**
Polling organisations or pollsters	8	**8.4**		7	**8.0**	**-.04**
Academics	6	**6.3**		8	**9.2**	**+2.9**
Business owners	8	**8.4**		4	**4.6**	**-3.8**
Non-political/ Unclear/Neutral Think Tank	5	**5.3**		4	**4.6**	**-0.7**
Electoral Commission/ IPSA	3	**3.2**		6	**6.9**	**-3.7**
Local Govt/ Govt depart/ Public authority	4	**4.2**		4	**4.6**	**+0.4**
Religious Groups (Muslim Council, Council Hindu Temples etc)	4	**4.2**		4	**4.6**	**+0.4**
Charities	6	**6.3**		-	**-**	**-6.3**

Trade Unions	2	**2.1**	4	**4.6**	**+2.5**
Legal sources	1	**1.1**	4	**4.6**	**-3.5**
Campaign Groups	2	**2.1**	3	**3.4**	**+1.3**
Research Centres, Societies/ NGO/	3	**3.2**	1	**1.1**	**-2.1**
Educational source	-	**-**	3	**3.4**	**+3.4**
Police/Military sources	-	**-**	3	**3.4**	**+3.4**
Royal Family	1	**1.1**	-	**-**	**-1.1**
Right-sided Think Tank	-		1	**1.1**	**+1.1**
Total	95	**100.0**	87	**100.0**	

Finally, we examined which parties dominated coverage and how politically balanced BuzzFeed was during both campaigns. Did, for example, BuzzFeed diversify its party-political coverage or have greater focus on the main parties? Table 9 shows that, in 2015, a far wider range of political parties featured prominently during the election beyond just the main Conservative and Labour parties. In 2017, by contrast, a far smaller pool of parties had a dominant focus in coverage, with the campaign largely fought between Labour and the Conservatives (the UK's two largest parties).

Table 9. Party dominance focus within election news on BuzzFeed

	2015			2017		
	Number of stories	**%**		**Number of stories**	**%**	**% change from 2015 to 2017**
Unclear	73	**31.1**		43	**26.2**	**-4.9**
Conservative	37	**15.7**		50	**30.5**	**+14.8**
Labour	54	**23.0**		47	**28.7**	**+5.7**
Lib Dem	13	**5.5**		11	**6.7**	**+1.2**
UKIP	26	**11.1**		6	**3.7**	**-7.3**
Greens	10	**4.3**		1	**0.6**	**-3.7**
SNP	17	**7.2**		5	**3.0**	**-4.2**
Others	5	**2.1**		1	**0.6**	**-1.5**
Total	235	**100.0**		164	**100.0**	

Since this shift to a narrower party-political focus was also evident in broadcast and press media coverage of the 2017 election campaign, this may reflect more of a political influence than an editorial judgement about sourcing. However, it does reinforce the perspective that BuzzFeed was following rather than diverging from the broader institutional logic of news media.

Towards an institutional news logic in digital native media?

We began the study by drawing on new institutional perspectives to news media, in particular Asp (2014) who theorised that over time the news media adopt similar characteristics that broadly represent a singular news logic. However, he concluded his study by asking "Will the emergence of "new digital media in the age of the internet imply the end of news media logic as an institution, a de-institutionalization?" (Asp 2014, 266). He proposed three possible scenarios: "the end of the news media logic institution; a situation of status quo (some constraints of the old media disappear, whereas some new constraints of the new media emerge); and a "stronger and refined" news media logic (the new media impose new constraints and new forms of dependencies)" (Asp 2014, 266).

Our content analysis of BuzzFeed UK's reporting ahead of the 2015 and 2017 elections suggested that, far from a new digital native media logic unsettling the logic of legacy media, the site largely conformed to the institutional norms and routines that have long guided how journalists report campaigns. Overall, we found BuzzFeed adopted a more serious news agenda, anchored by substantive policy issues, focussed on party political campaign events, with more specialist reporters and a greater reliance on institutional sources, including legacy media, and a narrower and more balanced selection of the main political parties. Taken together, we would argue that far from a "de-insutionalization" emerging in the new digital media environment – as Asp (2014) speculated – the institutional logic of news media appeared to shape how BuzzFeed's editorial agenda and practices evolved over time. Our study, in this respect, builds on a growing body of scholarship that has shown BuzzFeed's journalism has more closely resembled the legacy media it once claimed to be distinctive from (Wu 2016: Tandoc and Jenkins 2017; Stringer 2018; Tandoc 2018). Or, as Ryfe (2016) has articulately put it, the deeply entrenched routines of journalists have become central way of understanding change in newsrooms and explaining the editorial judgements behind news selection. Rather than digital native media setting expanding new journalistic boundaries (Carlson and Lewis 2016), it would appear in the case of BuzzFeed they have become institutionally connected with legacy media.

While digital native media have the potential to develop an alternative agenda to legacy media, our analysis suggests they conformed to the institutional power of news media logic or, more specifically, the norms and routines long associated with how elections are reported. As Crouse's (1973) *The Boys on the Bus* established in the 1970s, the logic of campaign reporting often leads to a kind of pack journalism or group think amongst reporters. This, the book claimed, is exacerbated during election campaigns, where source selection, news gathering and story framing *converge* across different outlets because journalists physically inhabit the same social space, and share similar journalistic values and practices. Our study suggests pack journalism continues to exist beyond the analogue age. While journalists still closely follow parties on the campaign trail (Cushion and Thomas 2018), they also today inhabit a common digital universe, sharing content, opinions and networking online and across social media platforms. This may, in part, help explain BuzzFeed's broadly similar logic to legacy media during the 2017 election campaign.

BuzzFeed's recruitment policy of hiring journalists from legacy media has also helped establish an institutional news media logic (Wu 2016; Tandoc and Jenkins 2017; Tandoc 2018; Tandoc and Yuan Wen Foo 2018). BuzzFeed reporters, for instance, now regularly appear as commentators on broadcast political programming along with other legacy journalists from the print and broadcasting sector. In February 2018, BuzzFeed's political editor, Emily Ashton, became the Parliamentary Lobby Chair, further signalling the shared institutional news logic given her role is to represent a wide range of legacy media reporters from organisations such as the *BBC, Guardian, Financial Times, Channel 4* and *Sky News*. Also in February 2018, long time BuzzFeed political reporter Jim Waterson was recruited by *The Guardian* as its new Media Editor (Mayhew 2018). Put more broadly, the institutional worlds of BuzzFeed and legacy media have become increasingly blurred over recent years, and our case study of election reporting suggested this has led to an editorial shift in its news media logic. We should also acknowledge there are wider consequences for digital journalism as a result of BuzzFeed moving towards a more serious news agenda. After all, since the digital native media site now reports fewer policy or "harder" topics in a light-hearted way and human-interest stories, and focusses on a narrower range of political sources it reflects the logic traditionally associated with how legacy tend to report election campaigns. In doing so, while BuzzFeed offers a more informative diet of news, its tone conforms to many legacy media outlets that diminishes the diversity of political coverage available to citizens in an online environment.

So how should we judge the convergence of digital native media and legacy news media logics? In the case of BuzzFeed, it led to a more serious and analytical approach to election reporting in 2017 compared with 2015. But we would not want to overstate the editorial similarities of BuzzFeed or digital native media with legacy media *more generally*. As Hurcombe, Burgess, and Harrington (2019,1) found in their study of BuzzFeed, Junkee, and Pedestrian.tv. in Australia, digital native media exhibited characteristics that represented, in their view, an "emerging genre of 'social news'…a 'born-digital' form of journalism which is both symptomatic of and a pragmatic response to the logics of social media". They further suggested that BuzzFeed, Junkee, and Pedestrian.tv content was distinctive from most legacy media because they have a strong editorial voice, take clear political positions on issues and eschew traditional conceptions of balanced journalism. While BuzzFeed UK far from subscribes to an objectivity norm and does not have any formal regulatory impartiality requirements, its narrower party-political focus and relative balance between the two main parties during the 2017 election campaign suggested it has not taken on the partisan approach traditionally associated with unregulated print media in the UK (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Since some digital native sites, most notably *Brietbart* and the *Huffington Post*, have developed a more ideologically driven approach to political reporting, BuzzFeed's more balanced approach is arguably in keeping with legacy news organisations who broadly follow norms of objectivity.

This points towards the need to understand the institutional context of media systems and journalism cultures *within and between different countries* when interpreting the logic of digital native media or news logic more generally. In doing so, empirical studies can more effectively theorise whether new logics are emerging, or if the institutional logic of news media is being maintained and reinforced in the digital age. So, for example, Walker (2018) noted that 18 journalists had recently left BuzzFeed UK, including Tom Philips and Jamie Ross, cutting its London staff from 140 to less than 100. Put another way, 46% of stories written by BuzzFeed's 2017 election coverage were no longer working at the organisation less than a year later. As a consequence, the institutional logic of its news reporting may be in flux as the editorial resources of its newsroom and journalism are reshaped.

Over recent years, new social and network media logics have been developed, with the aim of understanding the extent to which they operate distinctively from a mass media logic. Broadly speaking, the unique characteristics associated with this logic centre on the distribution and media usage of network media logic (Klinger and Svensson 2014). In this sense, digital native media clearly exhibit a new logic of disseminating and distributing media content, driven largely by younger age groups in interconnected networks, who routinely share news and information. In BuzzFeed's case, analysis has revealed it has an overriding objective to produce content that is widely "liked" and redistributed on social media (Wu, 2016). The importance of this viral sharing is that it promises – and often delivers – a rapidly burgeoning audience to advertisers. In other words, the political economy of BuzzFeed – and digital native media more generally – is anchored by a social media logic that encourages content to be instantly shared, liked and commented upon (Hurcombe, Burgess, and Harrington 2018). We would acknowledge our study did not capture all these production processes because the focus was on understanding *the content of election campaign reporting that could be compared to* the institutional news logic of legacy media reporting (e.g. the informational content and sourcing of news). This distinction is important to make because, as Klinger and Svensson (2014, 12) have argued, "It is the task of empirical studies to distinguish and measure the extent of mass media and network media logic in specific cases".

Our study, in this respect, found the logic of news reporting merging with a mass media logic rather than forging a new or distinctive path. We would theorise that a digital native media logic involves interacting with younger audiences in unique and idiosyncratic ways. But, in

terms of understanding *the actual content of news*, there remains a broad, systemic influence of news media logic that polices the boundaries of journalism. Put another way, as digital native media have evolved, become more popular and interconnected with legacy media, the norms and routines of their news reporting are not necessarily that distinguishable from a singular, institutional news media logic.

Notes

[1] We drew on an archive of *BuzzFeed* output here http://www.BuzzFeed.com/archive

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Appendix A

Variable	Level of Agreement	Cohen's Kappa
Tone (Table 1)	94.9	0.72
Fact or comment (Table 2)	90.1	0.78
Policy or process (Table 3)	92.3	0.81
Policy mentions (Table 4)	87.2	0.74
Non-policy focus (Table 5)	79.5	0.71
Reporter names (Table 6)	100.0	1.00
Sources (Tables 7/8)	91.2	0.88
Dominant party (Table 9)	89.7	0.87