

The promise of social media in political engagement: Examining the presence and engagement of monitorial citizens

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INTRODUCTION

• During the rise of social media and its use in politics since the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election, there has been speculation of social media becoming the definitive medium for re-engaging citizens in politics.

This may be due to social capital

• In terms of political engagement, social networks generate the connections that allow individuals to act.

However, voter turnout for the U.S. Presidential Election of 2012 decreased from the U.S. Presidential Election of 2008.

• Yet, minority and youth turnout remained high.

There is a possibility of the monitorial citizen

SURVEYING ONLINE TO OFFLINE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT (STUDY 1)

Hypothesis 1: The increase in Twitter use for politically related activities would lead to an increase in offline political engagement (not just voter turnout).

PARTICIPANTS

- 89 respondents
- 84% Female & 16% Male
- Age range: 18-23 years
- Emailed 53208 students across five different schools (a response rate of 0.17%)

METHODS

Replicated Vitak and her colleagues' (2011) survey study

RESULTS

Online Political Activity	
We are also interested if you have done any of the following. This is a list of some things people do regarding government and politics. Have you done any of these things in the past year?	Watched 2012 a 2012 election debate (clips or in its entirety) on the internet 61.76% (21 out of 39)
I use twitter to share political information	Disagree 61.54% (24 out of 39)
Offline Engagement	
I have become more interested in the Presidential Election of 2012 because of Twitter.	Disagree 48.39% (15 out of 31)
How much influence do you think someone like you can have over local government decisions?	Little to some influence 80.65% (25 out of 31)
How much influence do you think someone like you can have over national government decisions?	Very little to little influence 70.97 (22 out of 31)
I participated in more offline political activities because I heard about them on Twitter	Disagree 70.97% (22 out of 31)
Did you vote in the presidential election?	Yes 74.19% (23 out of 31)
My Twitter political groups use Twitter to organize in-person meetings.	Yes 12.82% No 48.72% Don't Know 38.46%

Note: Some results from the survey

- Twitter was more of an information source rather than a discussion medium.

TWITTER ACTIVITY AND SENTIMENT ANALYSIS (STUDY 2)

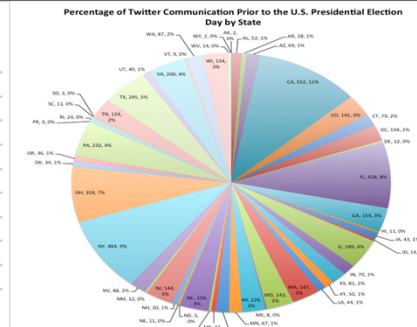
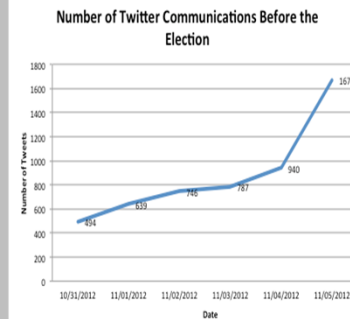
Hypothesis 2: There will be a greater frequency of Twitter communications in the battleground states (FL, IA, WI, OH, CO, NV, and NH) and as Election Day approaches [Stark & Roberts, 2012].

Hypothesis 2a: There will be greater sentiments of urgency, efficacy, and positive valence in the battleground states and as Election Day approaches.

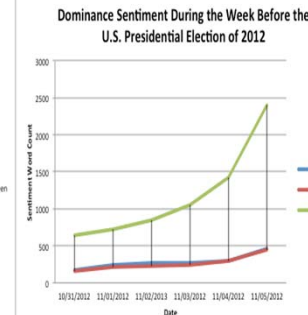
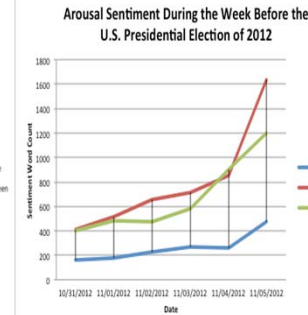
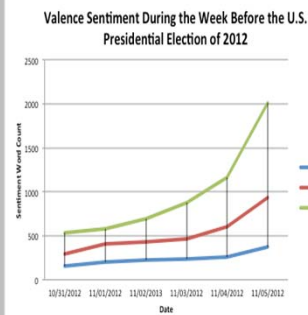
METHOD

- Obtained tweets from Gnip
 - Tweets were from #Election2012, #Obama, and #Romney
 - Date range: 10/31/2012 to 11/5/2012
- Excel was used to sort, graph, and statistically analyze tweets.
- Affective Norms for English Words (ANEW)
- R was used for sentiment analysis.

RESULTS



- Steady increase as Election Day approached
- Steep increase of activity on the day before the election
- Battleground States: 28% (instead of 16%).



- More prominent positive sentiment trend.
- More prominent trend indicating sentiment between calmness and urgency (excited) as Election Day approached.
- Very prominent efficacy (in control) trend.
- Standardized residuals of the proportions of Twitter sentiment including all 50 states and the Federal District of Washington D.C. did not show a pattern of significant instances of any of the categories of urgency, valence, and efficacy in the battleground states.

TWITTER NETWORK ANALYSIS (STUDY 3)

Hypothesis 3: Social media was expected to create greater social capital. Thus, a denser communication network was expected

METHOD

- Twitter dataset (Study 2) was used
- Excel was used to sort data
- Gephi was used for network visualization

RESULTS

- Out of 1110 connections (retweets and in reply to) to other users 857.
- Included politicians, celebrities, and news networks.
- The network is fragmented (4260 weakly connected communities out of 5354 nodes/users)
- Lack of connected communities (Average clustering coefficient: 0)
- Not well connected to other users (Average degree: 0.207)

LIMITATIONS

- (STUDY 1)
- Low response rate (89 students responded, yielding a response rate of 0.17%)
 - Not representative of all states and overall US population
 - Not distributed during campaign period
- (STUDY 2)
- Accuracy of Tweet rating (e.g. literal scoring may not detect sarcasm)
 - Limited analysis time frame
- (STUDY 3)
- Limited analysis time frame
 - Geographic information limitation

CONCLUSION

- Twitter was not facilitating the social capital that was expected. Instead, Twitter is an information source that spreads information that may or may not rouse action.
- The monitorial citizen manifests in Twitter activity.
 - No clear sentiment/emotion was determined for the monitorial citizen or a politically engaged citizen.

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