Social media usage by President Donald Trump before and after the 2016 elections

Roy Glueckstern

Alexi Benyacar

Sacha Grigri

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Advanced Topics in Social Network Analysis

Introduction and background of the study

According to Gill (2017), the present era of electronic revolution is one in which social media has become a means to an end in political sphere communication. Today, political marketing and advertising for persons seeking elective posts analyze, develop, execute and manage campaigns as a way of driving public opinion (Laing & Khattab, 2016). Social media provides a platform on which one can engage with the so-called connected generation. If the November 2016 elections are anything to go by, Twitter proved to be the medium of choice for citizens to engage and consume political content (Le et al., 2017). Ideally, tweets formed the basis of facilitating user engagement through the provision of content and newsbreaks. By extension, the mentioned discussions would influence the political discourse while establishing the capacity to determine the events of mainstream media.

This study seeks to establish social media usage by President Donald Trump before and after his election. An understanding of such trend is essential in inferring as to whether Social media, in this case Twitter, plays a role in the current political spheres by promoting influence of a given aspirant. This stems from various studies that have stated that there is an association between social media use and an aspirant's influence of the connected generation who are especially the youths. For instance, a thesis by Hwang (2016) observed that President Trump's Twitter usage contributes to his political poll success which he associates with a reflection of his personality in the media use. This was also observed by Lilleker, Jackson, Thorsen and Veneti (2016) who stated that President Trump's media use contributed to his election. It would hence be essential to understand President Trump's nature of usage of Twitter.

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) conducted a study in which they observed use of fake news to influence people into certain political alignments. Twitter was also observed as one of the channels through which fake news was distributed. This study might help to create a foundation under which more studies can be done to determine the association of social media with other issues facing the society such as fake news and environment issues and their role on presidential elections. It would also be worth noting that there has been high politicization of President Trump's use of Twitter especially during his Campaigns. This study would hence help to infer whether there is a change in this factor after his election.

Related work

The use of social media has had its advantages in seeking to influence what happens in the globe from a social capital perspective (Hayat, Lesser & Samuel-Azran, 2017), marketing perspective (Hayat & HersHKovitz, 2018), science communication perspective (Hayat, HersHKovitz & Samuel-Azran, 2019), health perspective (Hayat, Brainin & Neter, (2017) and from a political perspective (Hayat, Galily & Samuel-Azran, 2019; Hayat, Samuel-Azran, & Galily, 2016; Hayat, Samuel-Azran, 2019). The most significant role has come in influencing elections, with different people hailing its positive influence and others condemning it in equal measure. The mainstream media including the British Broadcasting Corporation have more than often relied on what happens on social media to determine content to their audience.

Some of the institutions that Trump targeted include President Obama's administration, the media coverage in the United States, global warming, climate change just to name but a few (Ott, 2017). Some of the issues highlighted have seen Trump use certain words, which include but are not limited to fake news, loser, dummy, terrible, stupid, weak, dishonest, incompetent, boring, pathetic, moron, racist, clown, overrated, disgusting, goofy and lowlife (Kreis, 2017). The background of his tweets offered a new phase to the elections, generating controversy in its wake. Ideally, his campaign behavior with Twitter influenced the elections to his advantage so much so that those influences seem to be continuing to date. The most controversial aspect of the elections was the fact that mainstream media had ruled off a Trump win, making it seem that Hillary Clinton would win anyway. On the contrary, Donald Trump would shock analysts by emerging winner through his win of the electoral vote. The same trend has also been set at the Brexit referendum.

Research question and hypothesis

This research paper seeks to answer the fundamental question, "Has Donald Trump's usage of Twitter changed before and after him being elected?" The null hypothesis will seek to determine lack of changes in how Donald Trump tweets. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis will be that he has changed since becoming the United States commander in chief. The period of the tweets specifies before and after elections in November 2016. The purpose is to determine whether there is change between the types of tweets he makes.

Methodology

Today, Trump is reported to have over 35000 tweets. The research will narrow down to about 300 of these tweets, with particular interest to those made from the year 2011 to date. While they will be originating from a single individual, the research paper will seek to divide the tweets based on the different subjects covered or the context under which Trump was writing them. By extension, they will also include the President's attacks on personalities before and after his election. Part of the tools to be used in the collection of the needed information is Buzilla. The platform gives an account of Trump's tweets in the past six months and beyond. Furthermore, it also helps in categorizing the same tweets based on content and specific subjects. The tools would be very useful in helping us establish whether there is a change in the type of tweets made at the time of posting.

More options are made available other than through Buzilla, with other methodologies such as interviews, surveys, content analysis and data mining also influencing the discussions in this research paper. Furthermore, there is also usefulness in considerations to data relating to both social media and human subjects. What people comment on Donald Trump's tweets indicates the perception on issues. However, there are challenges relating to relying on the

comments of other tweeter users, and it would be prudent to stick to that which is said by the person in question.

The challenge in looking for the tweets relating to Donald Trump would, therefore, rest in using snowball or chain samples to his communication from 2011 to date. Such a process takes into account a content analysis and text mining process that goes into detail on specific tweets. The situation is beneficial for this research because one obtains raw data on Trump's information behaviors. Secondly, the ease of access when it comes to massive data boosts the manner in which the whole research process ends. Lastly, there are opportunities to set easy parameters when it comes to the extent of using specific information.

The disadvantages that could render the methodology of text and data mining to be challenging include the fact that it is hard to collect data needed to know the specific tools and scripts. The research paper seeks to have Donald Trump's tweets diversified to cover different issues including his comments on media, fake news, the environment and foreign relations as already mentioned. The second challenge is that one needs to clean the data before considering it for the research since there could instances where the language used may not be appropriate. The concerns that help in arriving at the chosen methodology is the necessary balance that it offers concerning the advantages and challenges. The tenets of a good research methodology are met in the choice since considerations are given in addressing the research question, making use of qualitative analysis, identifying the scale of the problem to be addressed as well as using a sample of the entire population.

Results

For status, the answer to the question as to whether there are changes in the manner in which Trump continues to use his Twitter account is no. The explanation lies in the fact that the man has been unchanging in his approach to issues, whether as a former technocrat and a business leader or an American President (Kreis, 2017). He has been able to thrive on some of the conspiracies and comments he wrote, building an entire media ecosystem and political career around tweeting. Based on the number of people following him on his Twitter account, the power around the conversations he generates can only be revealing of his prowess in driving a certain agenda (Ahmadian, Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2017). Trump continues to demonstrate his brilliance by taking advantage of America's loss of faith in mainstream media, which for example, predicted a Hillary Clinton win in the election (Oates & Moe, 2016).

Prior research

I concluded the result after taking several initiatives. The first was to clarify Donald Trump's status as a celebrity, which would then allow for access to his twitter handle. I had to deal with the challenges of authenticating the actual Donald Trump account since other users

may also have similar or identical names, posing a challenge to detect the suggested account. Twitter in its capacity aided the position by offering handy data fields indicating its verification before saving the handle. I would move forward to use Twitter's API to download Trump's tweets and save them in a specific database.

The conclusions factor in the qualitative aspect of analysis that explains an understanding of the big picture without engaging any data analysis. The written, spoken and visual representations of Trump's tweets are what counts in the research (Ahmadian, Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2017). However, the data has to be coded through classification in a range of processes and procedures that help in interpreting the questions asked in the thesis statement. As per the research gathered to inform the discussion of this paper, one can affirm that it is adequate to raise the necessary conclusions. The results will foster a discussion that covers several areas, including the tweets that relate to personalities, job creation, fake news, foreign relations just to name but a few.

There is no chance that the result would turn out to be any different since the discussion addresses the research question effectively. The conversation sought is to affirm the reasoning in the fact that Donald Trump is still the same person he was before and after his election in the manner, he has been tweeting. However, there could be possible criticism on the evidence given as to portraying indifference. The general indication is that even though much might have changed in the man's life, the tone and diction of communication is the same in several respects. These positions as already mentioned are pointed out as in the discussion below:

Discussion

Tweets relating to personalities

The President has not only been consistent in general but also in the use of certain words against his critics. Does he not only consider them losers or dumb people but also feel they are stupid or weak (MacDonald & Villamayor, 2017). Casing point lies in one of his tweets of December 2011, in which he addresses Rosie as a loser. He says he feels sorry for Rosie's partner whose parents may be devastated that their daughter is a loser. By extension, Trump, in a tweet addressed to one Michelle Malkin in March 2013, said she was born stupid. After his election, Trump would then throw another bombshell on the New York Times within a week. Five days after the November 8 elections, he tweeted concerning the New York Times that it had become a newspaper of fiction and dishonesty. A week later, he would continue his rant on the newspaper by suggesting sarcastically that it was fortunate that the brand was dying.

Tweets relating to global warming and climate change

His resilience also seems to point to the fact that he has always been willing to lie in direct contradiction of the known facts (Kenneth White, 2016). While some consider Trump's tweets as groundless in their conjecture, others see them as epistles that are a necessary read. The president in one of his tweets mentions that he is one of the most intelligent persons (MacDonald & Villamayor, 2017). That should not come as any surprise considering that he appreciates being sensational. The man cares about that which is appalling enough to go viral, and he has proven so many times that he can do that (Littleton, 2017).

The best example of the mentioned segment is his responses to global warming. In January 2014, he would comment on the cold weather experienced in the United States as reported by NBC News. He asserted that since the reporting channel had just called it one of the coldest weather in years, the country should not have been spending money on global warming, which according to him was a hoax (Ahmadian, Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2017). He would reiterate in another tweet three days later that the snowing in Louisiana and Texas was record-setting so much so that there were freezing temperatures within the country and surrounding regions.

Following Trump's election into office, the Paris Accord became one of the talk points amongst nations all over the world (MacDonald & Villamayor, 2017). With his campaign promises seeking to bring back jobs into the United States by rejuvenating the coal mining industry, many feared that he would uphold his earlier beliefs against global warming and climate change. He would go on and tweet on May 31, 2017, that he would be announcing his decision on the Paris Accord over the next few days, with the caption make America great again. After these few days, he decided to withdraw from the accord even in the midst of desertion from

other world leaders during the G-Summit. The consistency with which Trump does his bidding only gets to prove that he has not changed at all.

Tweets on job creation and making America sing again

The man's brilliance is not in doubt. The Twitter world has enabled him to unfold various scenarios, disconnecting them from each other as they are from reality (Kenneth White, 2016). In fact, his background as an individual with no political experience did not matter when he offered himself to vie as a Republican candidate (Oates & Moe, 2016). The position has not changed this far since he does not have to substantiate some of the claims he has always made. His tweets are meant to play to people's deep-seated need to share comforting things and not the desire to understanding how the world operates (Watt et al., 2017).

One of the first 'new' coal mines of Trump era was opened in Pennsylvania on June 12 this year. Despite the backlash from social media users on how retrogressive the mining of coal was, Trump would stand his ground to advocate for the opening of other coal mining sites as a way of creating jobs in the United States (MacDonald & Villamayor, 2017). The support he demonstrated to the opening of coals mines subsequently vanquished America's participation in the Paris climate accord. He would sensationally claim on the day of announcing United States' moving out of the accord that he was elected by the people of Pittsburg and not Paris in representing the interests of the former.

Tweets against Barack Obama

According to Morgan, Lampe, and Shafiq (2013), Trump's tweeting has and continues to affirm some level of bias. The differences come in the subjects he has to comment on as the commander in chief rather than the initial outsider he was (Kellner, 2016). His reliance on

comparisons can only be defined as technically plausible rather than definitive. Some of the facts that he shares through his Twitter account may be an outright contradiction of the premises he believes (Watt et al., 2017).

The best case is his criticism of the former president of the United States Barack Obama. On August 12, 2012, Donald Trump tweeted saying that he was informed by a credible source that Barrack's birth certificate was a fraud. In September 2012, he had also tweeted that Obama was America's unlucky President. Everything he touched turned into a mess. He concluded that some people did not have the mantle to lead (O'Hara, 2017). At the beginning of November 2012, Trump would suggest that Obama had resorted to being a welfare and food stamp president, seeking to praise and expand welfare programs without believing in work.

Not all that he had to say about President Obama stopped on his election into office even though it took a new twist. Trump would focus his energies on repealing Obama Care, one of the social security programs started by the Obama administration (Cherkaoui, 2016). In a series of tweets posted mid last month, Trump suggested that he was ready at his desk to pen in hand the approval to replace the failed Obama Care once Republican senators worked on it. He was convinced that after seven years of the policy, the senators had to come through as they promised on the campaign trail. He highlighted that Mike Pence was working on the healthcare bill to do what was right by the people.

Tweets that could not be justified by aides

With Twitter, some of the extraordinary claims made by Trump have not needed extraordinary evidence to validate or back his school of thought (Watt et al., 2017). However, when forced to confront the realities of the circumstances in a rational manner, the likes of Sean Spicer, the former White House press secretary, have been unable to defend the president

definitively (Ahmadian, Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2017). His tweets create a craze big enough to put those working for him on the defensive when it comes to questions relating to him. To make matters worse, the press secretary had to defend typos and poor messaging. On 30 May 2017, Trump would make a typo error when commenting on the nature of press coverage. The next day, Sean would come out saying the president knew exactly what he meant despite the public being in the knowledge that Trump made a mistake.

Tweets relating to the media and their fake news

Trump's conformity in being himself is something that continues to stick with him (Cherkaoui, 2016). While his sentiments are complicated, he chooses to pick small facts about issues and uses them to cast doubt on the abilities of others. The nature of his complexity is unique since the mainstream media can generate content around his conversations, whether conspiracies or not (Gill, 2017). The president has bolstered his ability to facilitate illusory pattern perceptions. Thus, the people following Trump seem to have less control over their views and resort to portraying Trump in the most negative of ways to regain control.

The number of times he has mentioned fake news in his tweets has been monumental (Giglietto et al., 2016). With less than two weeks to his inauguration as the President, Trump would complain about how he would win an election easily yet his opponents would go on to belittle his victory with fake news. In the same day of January 11, 2017, he talked about the intelligence agencies allowing fake news to leak into the public sphere. He suggested that it was one last shot at him, and sought to understand whether the Americans were living in Nazi, Germany. He was sensational with Cable News Network experiencing a possible meltdown due to sinking ratings after their credibility levels were questioned due to the alleged fake news that they were shoving around (Le, Shafiq & Srinivasan, 2017).

The president is and remains a mastermind able to control the world from behind the scenes, just with the use of 140 characters (Morgan, Lampe & Shafiq, 2013). He finds the prospect of using Twitter reassuring since it has helped him on different fronts. Not only does he manage to appeal to his base but he also gives them the conviction that America is on its way towards greatness. The only question being asked is whether he found his way into more power than even he can handle (Bhattacharya et al., 2016). One of the most shattering observations have been the existence of assurances that seem to keep users believing that American issues can be oversimplified even when they are completely messy.

Tweets against foreign nations and leaders

According to Giglietto et al., (2016), he is also synonymous with the magic bullet theory antics. It is noticeable that in his tweeting, he gets to choose some of the traumatic things happening within his administration or life and then discards any explanations he finds unpleasant or inconvenient. To Trump, everything said about him is a threat and calls for his reaction (Gill, 2017). However, he has the benefit of the fact that he does not have to make an effort in winning arguments logically or with demographic inclinations. All he does through his tweets is to show some level of fear and more confusion to what he expects people to believe (Oates & Moe, 2016).

On March 17 this year, Trump attacked North Korea on a tweet, suggesting that it was misbehaving following its ballistic missile test. He would suggest that the nation had been playing the United States for years with the Chinese doing little to help. When North Korea persisted with its tests, Trump took to Twitter on June 20 again to appreciate in a sarcastic tone the efforts of the Chinese president in helping with North Korea.

The tweets spark an arsenal of resistance, helping portray the highest level of skepticism in connecting random dots on issues (Oates & Moe, 2016). Once something becomes part of your belief system, then it can become difficult to see the world as it truly is. The best case is a confession asserting that Mexico would pay for the wall. He tweeted those sentiments on September 1, 2016, way before he was elected into office. On entering the oval office, the budget provisions could not allow for the immediate implementation of the promise, so he had to come up with something. When the House Appropriations Committee allocated \$1.6 billion towards the construction, Trump was quick to mention the big win on a tweet dated July 13, 2017. He was categorical that building the wall would secure the border and save lives. On August 27 this year, he would suggest that since Mexico is one of the highest crime nations in the world, the United States must have the wall and the former would pay for it through reimbursement. The tweet on 27 August alludes to an earlier one written on 23 June 2017 where Mexico was still being castigated and compared to Syria.

Tweets relating to relations within the US

The nature of his tweeting has the capacity of decreasing pro-social tendencies advocating for certain interests. It invokes a sense of doomsday mentality in followers so that they just want to watch on the sidelines and expect things to still fall into place (Cherkaoui, 2016). The dangerous levels of delusion that Trump has always offered in some of the messages have not gone unnoticed. Some are false assurances that one cannot do anything about due to the possible responses that Trump would give in his defense (Le et al., 2017).

Following his failure to rebuke the violence that erupted Charlottesville and the subsequent resignation of some of the business leaders that were to advise Trump, he perceived it personal (Giroux, 2017). The easiest of targets was Ken Frazier of Merck Pharmaceuticals on 14 August

2017, whom he mentioned as one who would be having more time to lower rip-off drug prices. The next day, he accused the media of not being satisfied with spreading untrue stories after his additional remarks on Charlottesville.

On the other hand, he has been categorical in rallying his support base against institutions he is expected to oversee. Ideally, Trump has been collaborating his presidency with a radical fringe (MacDonald & Villamayor, 2017). While the comments he posts may end up winning or losing among followers, the standoff they engineer is always set to diminish the credibility of the institutions addressed. The only difference noticeable is that he goes around the mainstream media to marshal support. His support base has proven to be motivated whenever it sees him on the attack against persons considered political elites.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the paper is that Donald Trump has not changed before and after the elections. The visible change involves the change of guard from a business leader and magnate to a man who has to handle politics on a full-time basis. Analysts within political circles continue to monitor the situation in the United States as it unfolds to take lessons on possible scenarios for the future. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union in a referendum held on 23 June 2016 served as a possible catalyst for a political revolution that would also see the American electorate defy the odds in choosing Trump as the president. No one denies the influence that social media has played, considering that for many, it has set a precedent on the strategies to utilize when seeking elective posts.

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