

Social Media and Political Participation

Lab 3

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January 6, 2017

¹Adapted from Pablo Barberá and Drew Dimmery

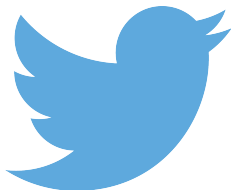
Today

- Twitter: what is it? Main features.
- Introduction to the Twitter API
- Capturing your own collection of tweets
- Analyzing Twitter data
- Tweet coding: training and details about task
- In-class exercise: collect and analyze your own Twitter data

Twitter

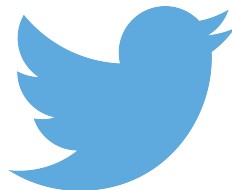
Twitter's numbers

- 320+ million monthly active users
- 500+ million tweets are sent everyday
- 18% of online U.S. adults use Twitter
- 25% of young adults in US (18-29) report using Twitter actively
- 52% of Twitter users get news through this platform
- 95% of Members of U.S. Congress have a Twitter account
- 77% of the governments of U.N. member countries have a presence on Twitter



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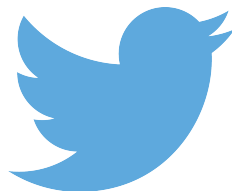
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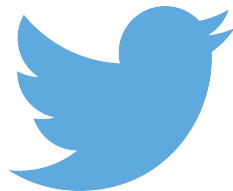
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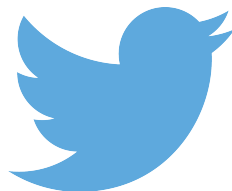
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Twitter's main features

The screenshot displays the Twitter web interface. At the top, navigation links include Home, Moments, Notifications, and Messages. A search bar and a 'Tweet' button are also present. The main content area shows a tweet by Adam Smith (@asmith83) retweeted by Brendan Nyhan, discussing a press conference by Donald J. Trump. The left sidebar features a user profile for Sean Kates (@SKates5350) and a 'Trends' section with various hashtags. The right sidebar shows 'Who to follow' suggestions and a 'Find friends' section.

Home Moments Notifications Messages

Search Twitter

Sean Kates @SKates5350
TWEETS 35 FOLLOWING 298 FOLLOWERS 22

Trends · Change

- #Star 45.3K Tweets
- #SeizeTheDayBy 5,861 Tweets
- #ThursdayThought 11.6K Tweets
- #BLMKidnapping 293K Tweets
- #BadGrittyReboots
- #NationalBirdDay 1,011 Tweets
- #MarijuanaFunFacts 4,855 Tweets
- The Anti-Inauguration

What's happening?

Brendan Nyhan Retweeted
Adam Smith @asmith83 · 2h
Five weeks ago today Trump said he'd hold a press conference to talk about his conflicts and still no plan.

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
I will be holding a major news conference in New York City with my children on December 15 to discuss the fact that I will be leaving my ...

4 102 101

(((Rob Ford))) Retweeted
John Pollock @John_Pollock22 · 1h
Hard to disagree w/ @stephenkb here, maybe #TheresaMay is being v clear and we don't like the answer? #Brexit newstatesman.com/politics/stagg...

based on what ministers *haven't* ruled out: that is, continuing to pay money to the European Union after we've left. Or, to translate it into Vote Leave speak:

Who to follow · Refresh · View all

- Donna Yates** @DrDonna... Follow
- Joseph Arthur** @josephart... Follow
- Emine Deniz** @ed947nyu Followed by Saad Gulzar and others Follow

Find friends

© 2017 Twitter About Help Terms Privacy Cookies Ads info Brand Blog Status Apps Jobs Businesses Media Developers

Advertise with Twitter

Twitter's main features

- Users send messages of up to 140 characters, called **tweets**
- User name (**screen names**) start with an @ sign.
- Each individual can choose to **follow** other users, which will make their tweets appear on that individual's **timeline**
- Other features:

hashtags Words or phrases prefixed with the # symbol that are used to group tweets by topic

@-replies Tweets that begin with the @ symbol followed by a user name (public messages)

retweets Re-publication of another user's content with an indication of its original author

mentions Action of including the screen name of another user in a tweet

trending topics Popular hashtags or phrases

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The offline effects of Twitter

- ① Twitter metrics can predict real-world outcomes:
 - Box-office revenue, spread of flu, happiness and general mood, epicenter of earthquakes... even the winner of 'American Idol'.
- ② Studies show that different Twitter metrics were correlated with election results in many countries.
 - BUT: "the predictive power of Twitter regarding elections has been greatly exaggerated" (Gayo-Avello, 2012)
- ③ Social media solve collective action problems, facilitate information diffusion, and thus foster spread of protest.
 - Arab Spring: "The revolutions were tweeted?"
 - Necessary or sufficient cause? Lack of rigorous empirical work
- ④ Twitter and word-of-mouth marketing

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Twitter and social science research

Most studies on the effects of social media so far have used Twitter data. Why?

- Presence of many influential actors (journalists, politicians, celebrities...). Spillover effects.
- Effort by political campaigns to generate users' engagement
- Public nature: facilitates access to tweets with the API, and generates dynamics of competition and public expression
- Academic research has shown connection to offline behavior

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Twitter API

Twitter API

API = *Application Programming Interface*

Four different methods to collect tweets:

- 1 **Filter stream:** tweets filtered by keywords.
Example: tweets mentioning "Obama" and "Russia"
- 2 **Geo stream:** tweets filtered by location
Example: tweets sent from the Arabian peninsula
- 3 **Sample stream:** 1% random sample of tweets
- 4 **Timeline:** tweets sent by a given user
Example: tweets sent by @nytimes

Important: except for the last option, tweets can only be downloaded in real time (as they are being published)

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Anatomy of a tweet



Anatomy of a tweet

Tweets are stored in JSON format:

```
{ "created_at": "Wed Nov 07 04:16:18 +0000 2012",  
  "id": 266031293945503744,  
  "text": "Four more years. http://t.co/bAJE6Vom",  
  "source": "web",  
  "user": {  
    "id": 813286,  
    "name": "Barack Obama",  
    "screen_name": "BarackObama",  
    "location": "Washington, DC",  
    "description": "This account is run by Organizing for Action staff.  
    Tweets from the President are signed -bo.",  
    "url": "http://t.co/8aJ56Jcemr",  
    "protected": false,  
    "followers_count": 40873124,  
    "friends_count": 654580,  
    "listed_count": 202495,  
    "created_at": "Mon Mar 05 22:08:25 +0000 2007",  
    "time_zone": "Eastern Time (US & Canada)",  
    "statuses_count": 10687,  
    "lang": "en" },  
  "coordinates": null,  
  "retweet_count": 783488,  
  "favorite_count": 295026,  
  "lang": "en"  
}
```

Collecting Twitter Data

The R script `lab3_collecting_tweets.R` shows how to:

- Install R package to download tweets
- Open an OAuth token and authenticate
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Analysis of Twitter data

Using the grep function

grep allows you to search for any word inside a text expression.

There are two variants of this command. The first one, `grepl` (with an `l` at the end), returns `TRUE` or `FALSE` depending on whether the text contains that word. For example:

```
> tweet = "four more years"
> grepl("year", tweet)
[1] TRUE
> tweet = "Four More Years"
> grepl("year", tweet)
[1] FALSE
> grepl("year", tweet, ignore.case=TRUE)
[1] TRUE
```

If you set `ignore.case=TRUE`, it will not distinguish between lower and upper case.

Using the grep function

The second variant, `grep` (without an `l` at the end), work for text vectors with more than one element, and returns the position of the elements that contain that word. For example:

```
> tweets = c("four more years",  
             "obama is reelected for another four years")  
> grep("year", tweets)  
[1] 1 2  
> grep("obama", tweets)  
[1] 2  
> grep("more", tweets)  
[1] 1
```

Collecting Twitter Data

The R script `lab3_analyzing_tweets.R` shows how to:

- Open a file with tweets in JSON format
- Analyze key variables about tweets: language, device, country, user characteristics, whether they mention specific words...
- Visualize tweet text with a word cloud
- Visualize geolocated tweets on a map

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Tweet Coding Exercise

Tweet Coding Exercise

- Hate Speech Tweets from Trump and Hillary Collections:
- Two parts:
 - 1 In-class training:
 - Go to: bit.ly/inclasscode and create an account
 - We will code a few tweets in class
 - 2 Weekend assignment
 - Go to: bit.ly/hatespeechcode
 - Spend 90 minutes coding tweets (Number of Tweets will vary....but not by too much 😊)
 - Due by Monday at 10am

In-class exercise

In-class exercise: collecting and analyzing Twitter data

Create your own R script (with comments) that:

- ① Downloads one minute of tweets about a celebrity or politician
 - ② Runs different commands to answer the following questions:
 - ① In what language are tweets mentioning this person written?
 - ② What does the most retweeted tweet say about this person?
 - ③ Which tweet was sent by the person with the most followers?
- optional Create a word cloud with these tweets. What do you learn?

And send it to me via email (sk5350@nyu.edu)