

# CAPITOL

# Tweets

Yeas and Nays of the  
Congressional Twitterverse



March 21, 2012

# Political Tweets Through the Years

• <b>March 11, 2007</b>	Twitter wins SXSW Web Award <sup>1</sup> and becomes the most talked about product at the conference, increasing use from 20,000 to 60,000 messages a day
• <b>Sept. 7, 2007</b>	Private citizen @TimMcGhee launches @thewhitehouse, linking the official WhiteHouse.gov RSS news feed to Twitter and establishing the first, albeit unofficial, White House presence on Twitter
• <b>June 24, 2008</b>	During a meeting at the White House with President George W. Bush, Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas) becomes the first Member of Congress <sup>2</sup> to post a tweet from the Oval Office
• <b>July 8, 2008</b>	Committee on House Administration moves to forbid Members from posting <sup>3</sup> in an official capacity on non-government domains, causing an uproar among some members and inspiring the "Let Our Congress Tweet!" campaign
• <b>Aug. 7, 2008</b>	In the wake of rising energy costs, GOP lawmakers take to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives to urge their colleagues to return to Washington, D.C. for debate. Congress was adjourned so cameras were turned off and mainstream media were locked out. Members use social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and Qik to organize and broadcast the #dontgo movement <sup>4</sup>
• <b>Sept. 26, 2008</b>	House Republicans start The New Media Caucus <sup>5</sup> aimed at bringing colleagues onto Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and other sites
• <b>Oct. 2, 2008</b>	In the face of the "Let Our Congress Tweet!" campaign and petition, the Committee on House Administration adopts new rules <sup>6</sup> that permit Members to post content on outside websites so long as it is for 'official purposes' and is in compliance with federal law and House rules and regulations
• <b>Dec. 15, 2008</b>	TweetCongress records 38 Members of Congress <sup>7</sup> who use Twitter
• <b>Jan. 20, 2009</b>	Along with the rollout of a new Whitehouse.gov, Barack Obama becomes the first President to officially join Twitter, <sup>8</sup> using the verified account @whitehouse
• <b>Feb. 9, 2009</b>	Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.) breaches security by tweeting "Just landed in Baghdad" <sup>9</sup> during a top-secret CODEL trip as part of the House Intelligence Committee
• <b>Feb. 25, 2009</b>	Some House and Senate Members cause controversy by live-tweeting <sup>10</sup> from the U.S. House Chamber for the first time during President Barack Obama's State of the Union address
• <b>June 8, 2009</b>	Sunlight Foundation reports that 200 Members of Congress <sup>11</sup> are on Twitter
• <b>July 13, 2009</b>	Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) becomes first U.S. Senator to reach 1 million Twitter followers <sup>12</sup>
• <b>Jan. 18, 2010</b>	President Obama pushes 'send' on a tweet during a visit to Red Cross HQ to assess Haiti earthquake relief efforts <sup>13</sup>
• <b>Feb. 13, 2010</b>	White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs officially launches the Twitter account @PressSec after witnessing one of his deputies, Bill Burton, utilize the platform
• <b>March 10, 2010</b>	House Democrats host first multi-member Twitter Town Hall <sup>14</sup> with hashtag #AskDems
• <b>April 20, 2010</b>	House Republican Caucus begins the New Media Challenge, a six-week contest calling on Members to expand their presences on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube <sup>15</sup>
• <b>May 20, 2010</b>	Reps. Mike Honda (D-Calif.) and Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) create the Democratic Caucus New Media Working Group <sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://laughingsquid.com/twitter-wins-sxsw-web-award/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://scobleizer.com/2008/06/24/how-is-technology-changing-the-world-of-washington-dc/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://georgedonnely.com/politics/house-dems-regulate-congress-twitter-posts>

<sup>4</sup> <http://capitalgig.com/2008/08/07/drill-here-tweet-now-and-qik/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://techdailydose.nationaljournal.com/2008/09/house-republicans-launch-new-m.php>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.opencongress.org/wiki/Fracking\\_and\\_Web\\_Use\\_Restrictions](http://www.opencongress.org/wiki/Fracking_and_Web_Use_Restrictions)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.politico.com/blogs/anneschroeder/1208/TweetCongress.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://mashable.com/2009/01/20/the-white-house-on-twitter/>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.politico.com/blogs/glennthrush/0209/Tweeting\\_Hoekstra\\_reveals\\_Baghdad\\_location\\_.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/glennthrush/0209/Tweeting_Hoekstra_reveals_Baghdad_location_.html)

<sup>10</sup> <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2009/02/25/members-of-congress-twitter-through-obamas-big-speech/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105128505>

<sup>12</sup> <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/onpolitics/post/2009/07/68494303/1>

<sup>13</sup> <http://mashable.com/2010/01/18/obamas-first-real-tweet/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://garamendi.house.gov/2010/03/garamendi-joins-more-than-twenty-house-democrats-in-congressional-twitter-town-hall-on-the-gop-so-be.shtml>

<sup>15</sup> <http://thehill.com/blogs/hillicon-valley/technology/93325-house-gopers-launch-new-media-challenge>

<sup>16</sup> <http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/house-dems-get-new-media-space-their-own>

• June 9, 2010	Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) tweets with MTV “Jersey Shore” reality star @Snooki <sup>17</sup>
• Nov. 4, 2010	Twitter announces that C-SPAN veteran Adam Sharp will join company as first Washington, D.C. employee <sup>18</sup>
• Nov. 18, 2010	Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) issues an apology for a profane tweet <sup>19</sup> published from his account
• Jan. 5, 2011	112th Congress participates in the First “Great Twitter Handover,” in which House leadership handles transfer from Democrats to Republicans <sup>20</sup>
• Feb. 28, 2011	Almost two weeks after his first press briefing, new White House Press Secretary Jay Carney officially assumes control of @PressSec <sup>21</sup>
• May 27, 2011	Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) accidentally publishes an inappropriate photo on Twitter, <sup>22</sup> unraveling a history of secret online exchanges
• June 16, 2011	Anthony Weiner resigns from Congress, <sup>23</sup> becoming the first Member of Congress to step down over indiscretions on Twitter
• June 19, 2011	President Obama sends first tweet <sup>24</sup> from @BarackObama, signing the tweet with “-B0”
• July 4, 2011	Vice President Joe Biden joins Twitter <sup>25</sup> on @VP account, managed by his staff
• July 6, 2011	White House teams up with Twitter for first White House Twitter Town Hall <sup>26</sup> and Tweetup; questions are submitted via the #AskObama hashtag
• July 29, 2011	President Obama’s #compromise campaign targets Republican Senators and Representatives, encouraging followers to contact them and urge support for “a bipartisan solution to the deficit crisis;” this results in a loss of roughly 36,000 followers <sup>27</sup>
• Aug. 29, 2011	Twitter names Capitol Hill and FCC veteran Colin Crowell as its head of global public policy, expanding its presence in Washington, D.C. <sup>28</sup>
• Sept. 8, 2011	Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.) skips President Obama’s job speech in favor of live-tweeting <sup>29</sup> the address
• Sept. 10, 2011	President Obama becomes first politician to reach 10 million Twitter followers <sup>30</sup>
• Sept. 21, 2011	Google’s Peter Greenberger jumps to Twitter’s Washington, D.C. team to lead political sales efforts <sup>31</sup>
• Oct. 19, 2011	First Lady Michelle Obama sends her first tweet from the @JoiningForces account before throwing out the first pitch at Game One of the World Series <sup>32</sup>
• Nov. 8, 2011	Republican digital strategist Mindy Finn joins Twitter’s Washington, D.C. staff <sup>33</sup> as head of strategic partnerships
• Jan. 12, 2012	First Lady Michelle Obama joins Twitter as @michelleobama <sup>34</sup>
• Jan. 23, 2012	Hacker group Anonymous takes control of Sen. Chuck Grassley’s (R-Iowa) Twitter account <sup>35</sup> in protest of ACTA, SOPA and PIPA legislation
• Jan. 24, 2012	766,681 tweets referencing #SOTU and related keywords (548 from Members of Congress) are sent during President Obama’s State of the Union address and the GOP response <sup>36</sup>
• Jan. 26, 2012	Vice President Joe Biden hosts first Twitter chat <sup>37</sup>
• Feb. 7, 2012	Twitter reports to Edelman that 88 percent of U.S. Senators and 86 percent of Representatives are using the platform

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1641206/snooki-john-mccain-bond-on-twitter-over-tanning-taxes.jhtml>

<sup>18</sup> <http://vator.tv/news/2010-11-04-twitter-hires-c-span-executive-as-dc-staffer>

<sup>19</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2010/11/the-hazards-of-twitter-dodds-account-posts-profane-tweet-staff-apologizes/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/inside-112th-congress-great-twitter-handover>

<sup>21</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/cutline/press-secretary-jay-carney-joins-twitter-20110228-091242-156.html>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/16/anthony-weiner-resigns-scandal\\_n\\_878161.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/16/anthony-weiner-resigns-scandal_n_878161.html)

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/16/anthony-weiner-resigns-scandal\\_n\\_878161.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/16/anthony-weiner-resigns-scandal_n_878161.html)

<sup>24</sup> <http://thenextweb.com/twitter/2011/06/19/obamas-first-tweet/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://techcrunch.com/2011/07/04/u-s-vice-president-joe-biden-vp-joins-twitter/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/theoval/post/2011/06/obama-to-host-town-hall-on-twitter/1#.Tz6nLcWm92A>

<sup>27</sup> <http://simplymeasured.com/blog/2011/08/president-obamas-compromise-campaign/>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/29/colin-crowell-twitter-head-of-global-public-policy\\_n\\_940678.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/29/colin-crowell-twitter-head-of-global-public-policy_n_940678.html)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0911/62974.html>

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/barack-obama-twitter-10-million-followers\\_b13599](http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/barack-obama-twitter-10-million-followers_b13599)

<sup>31</sup> <http://techcrunch.com/2011/09/21/twitter-political-ads/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/10/20/watch-first-lady-michelle-obama-s-first-tweet>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1111/Twitter\\_hires\\_Finn\\_in\\_political\\_push.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1111/Twitter_hires_Finn_in_political_push.html)

<sup>34</sup> <http://mashable.com/2012/01/12/michelle-obama-twitter/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://idealab.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/01/sen-chuck-grassleys-twitter-account-hacked-by-anonymous-follower.php>

<sup>36</sup> <http://thenextweb.com/twitter/2012/01/25/twitter-more-than-760000-tweets-sent-during-state-of-the-union-address/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://twitter.com/#!/VP/status/162612732561080320/photo/1>

# Introduction

In 2011, Twitter became a political powerhouse. The microblogging platform helped fuel a revolution.<sup>38</sup> It brought down a charismatic and popular U.S. Congressman.<sup>39</sup> And the first-ever White House Twitter Town Hall allowed President Obama to speak directly to constituents about economic issues.<sup>40</sup>

Twitter achieved this unprecedented impact in part by giving lawmakers an online soapbox – providing an opportunity to step out from behind the curtain, shed light on the governing process, and connect directly with voters. Thanks to the fact that smartphones and tablets are now allowed on the floor of the House of Representatives,<sup>41</sup> Twitter can potentially give constituents non-stop, real-time access to their elected officials.

At 100 million monthly active users, Twitter is revolutionizing information-sharing, reporting and brand management. This paper explores a specific topic area – Twitter’s role in the democratization of political communication and its use among U.S. Members of Congress. In this analysis, we aim to define the Twitter behaviors that make for a successful Congressional tweeter, ultimately identifying the Twitter Best Practices for Members of Congress.

## Methodology

Using pre-existing resources like TweetCongress<sup>42</sup> and a C-SPAN Twitter list,<sup>43</sup> we compiled a data set of 456 Congressional Twitter handles. We made a sincere effort to only include government accounts, differentiating between official accounts and campaign accounts, which typically aren’t subject to the same internal guidelines. Our data set ultimately included 89 Senators and 367 Representatives, of which 194 were Democrats, 260 were Republicans and two were Independents. We also included Members’ ages and assigned geographic data using the four regions established by the Census Bureau.<sup>44</sup>

Twitter data for this study, including all tweets, timestamps, follower counts and any associated metadata were provided by Simply Measured,<sup>45</sup> a leading social media analytics tool. The data set included sent and received tweets over the course of 112 days, from Sept. 2, 2011 through Dec. 25, 2011. We analyzed 59,270 sent tweets from Members of Congress. Results were normalized by Twitter handle to account for differences among sample group sizes, including chamber, party, age, and other factors. Please see the appendix for a more detailed methodology, glossary of terms, and additional research considerations.

### Our Study

- 112 days
- 456 Member handles with 5,184,182 followers
- 11,369 average followers per handle
- 59,270 Member tweets
- 130 average tweets per handle
- 1,312,861 mentions
- 3,325 average mentions per handle

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.edelman.digital.com/2011/02/04/digital-insights-from-egypts-revolution/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/nyregion/for-rep-anthony-weiner-twitter-has-double-edge.html>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/30/white-house-host-twitter-townhall>

<sup>41</sup> <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/24/blackberries-and-ipads-come-to-the-house-floor/>

<sup>42</sup> <http://tweetcongress.org/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://twitter.com/#!/cspan/members-of-congress>

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us\\_regdiv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> <http://simplymeasured.com/>

## A Survey of Existing Research

To date, most analysis of Congressional Twitter use has focused primarily on rates of Twitter adoption and the demographics of Congressional tweeters. In our preliminary research, we reviewed a Burson-Marsteller report<sup>46</sup> on Twitter adoption that distinguished between “campaign” accounts and “Congressional office” accounts, and found that 62 percent of Congress was active on the platform; “Twongress,” a white paper<sup>47</sup> by Mark Senak, J.D., which found that House Republicans are the most active microbloggers; @Congress, a report by the Medill News Service for The Associated Press that identified the most frequent replier and retweeter in Congress;<sup>48</sup> and a Brigham Young University analysis<sup>49</sup> that looked at electoral vulnerability as a potential indicator of Twitter adoption.

A study by University of Maryland researchers<sup>50</sup> is the only one we identified that qualitatively analyzed the content of Members’ tweets. This study analyzed 6,000 tweets from Members of Congress and found that 80 percent of the postings fell into two categories: links to “mostly self-serving” news articles and press releases, or status updates chronicling the lawmakers’ latest trips and activities. The study found that Members of Congress used just 7 percent of their tweets to interact with citizens.

These studies mark the beginning of useful research into Twitter’s role in political communication. Yet there remains a critical gap: none of these studies have defined what success looks like for Members of Congress on Twitter or identified the behaviors that drive their success.

There is no formal policy that dictates how Members of Congress use Twitter. As a powerful new platform for interaction and information sharing, politicians and their offices must resort to flying blind, with little beyond anecdotal evidence to indicate what works and what doesn’t, and why.

In this analysis, we aim to remedy this knowledge gap by exploring Members’ of Congress behavior on Twitter and defining and prescribing metrics for their success.

### Twitter Adoption

- 400 million unique monthly visitors
- 100 million active monthly users
- 50 million users log in every day
- 250 million tweets posted every day
- 1 billion tweets posted every 4 days
- 8,900 tweets posted per second

Via @TwitterAds, Jan. 2012

## Metrics for Success on Twitter

While successful use of Twitter is subjective, there are certain goals nearly every politician shares. For this study, we identified five metrics consistent with goals such as achieving message traction online and increasing prominence within the political dialogue.

**Engagement** – Defined as the volume of replies – sent via Twitter’s reply button – in response to tweets posted by Members of Congress. As a communications medium, Twitter offers legislators the opportunity to connect directly with the electorate. Engagement is an important measure of how effectively Members of Congress are connecting with their constituents.

**Mentions** – Defined as the total number of tweets in which the Twitter handle of a Member of Congress was mentioned. This term includes traditional retweets of (e.g. “RT @SenatorReid”) and replies to Members’ tweets, as well as static tweets that mention a Member’s Twitter handle. As a metric, total mentions roughly indicates an individual’s prominence in the ongoing political dialogue on Twitter.

<sup>46</sup> [http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation\\_and\\_insights/blogs\\_and\\_podcasts/BM\\_Blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=207](http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=207)

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.eyeonfda.com/files/twongress-white-paper-final-1-14-10.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> <http://medilldc.net/2011/09/congress-it%E2%80%99s-a-dialogue-with-millennials/>

<sup>49</sup> <http://news.byu.edu/archive/11-sep-twittercongress.aspx>

<sup>50</sup> <http://hcil.cs.umd.edu/trs/2009-32/2009-32.pdf>

**Amplification** – Defined as the volume of retweets – posted via Twitter’s retweet button – of Members’ tweets. Retweets are a vital part of message spread and traction on Twitter, an obvious political goal.

**Follower Growth** – While an increased follower count is not the Holy Grail of Twitter success, amplification, engagement, and influence tend to scale with reach. The more sets of eyes that can potentially see a message, the greater the chance that message will be retweeted or replied to, spreading that message to an even larger audience.

**TweetLevel Influence** – A proprietary metric developed in-house by Edelman, TweetLevel uses an algorithm to score Twitter users according to how influential, popular, engaging and trustworthy they are. The TweetLevel formula combines 16 metrics to determine an overall “Influence” score, weighted on a scale from 0 – 100.

## Who is Successful?

*Congressional Republicans use Twitter more effectively than Democrats.*

Looking first along party lines – as we do for everything from Congressional baseball games to chamber seating – Republicans in Congress used Twitter more effectively than Democrats. Some metrics broke down along interesting geographic lines. Members from the West saw the fastest follower growth and were mentioned most frequently. Members from the Midwest received the most replies from Twitter users in response to their content. Members from the Northeast were by far the most amplified group, generating significantly more retweets than any other region.

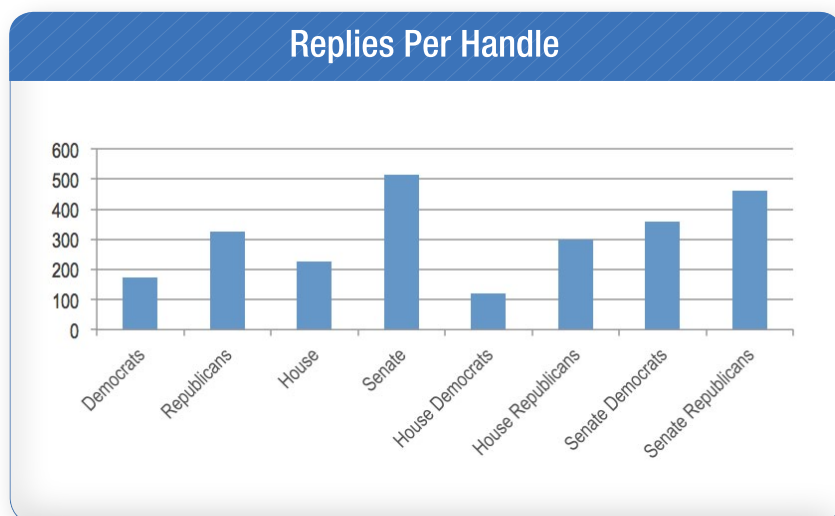
“Since I’ve been here in Washington, things have changed dramatically. I guarantee I have more people at my first Twitter Town Hall than I have at some of my town halls where we used to send stuff out in the mail.”

– Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.)

## Engagement

*Senators receive more than twice the number of replies as Representatives.*

Republicans in Congress received almost twice as many replies as Democrats on average. Members from states in the Midwest received the most replies, followed by Members from the West. Additionally, Senators averaged more than twice as many replies as Representatives. This disparity is likely a result of the fact that Senators have more constituents and reflects the Senate’s status as the “upper” house of the legislature.

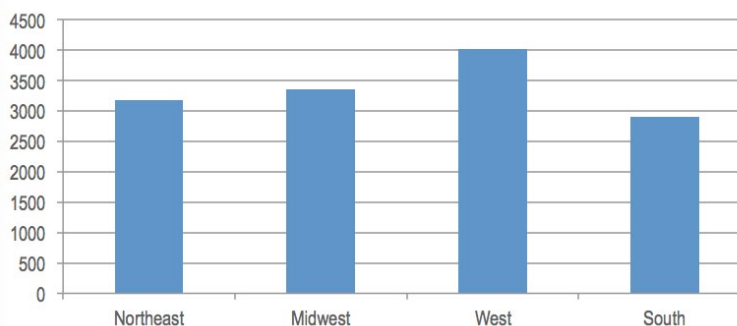


## Mentions

*Senate Republicans lead the way.*

Overall, Senate Republicans were the most-mentioned Congressional handles on Twitter, with an average of almost 5,400 mentions per handle. In comparison, Senate Democrats averaged 4,419 mentions per handle, while House Democrats averaged 1,584 mentions per handle and House Republicans averaged 3,270 mentions per handle. Of the remaining demographics, only Members of Congress from Western states stood out as top performers, receiving more mentions than other region.

### Mentions Per Handle



## Amplification

*Members from the Northeast earn roughly three times the number of retweets as Members from the Midwest and South.*

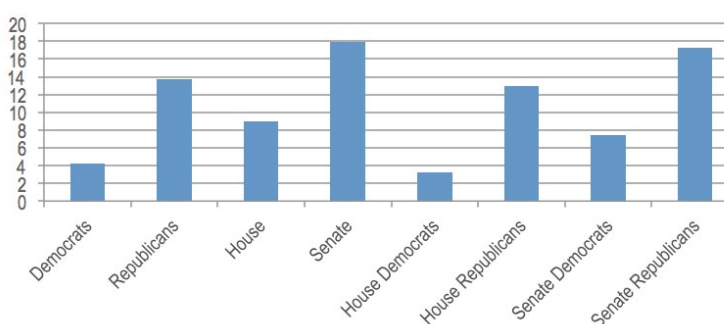
Members of Congress from states in the Northeast were by far the most-retweeted Congressional handles. Members from the Northeast boasted almost twice as many average retweets as the next-closest region (West), and roughly three times as many as the remaining two regions (Midwest, South).

Senators were far more effective at generating retweets than their counterparts in the House. On average, each Senator earned more than 4.5 times as many retweets as each Representative during the same time period.

In terms of the raw number of retweets per handle, Democrats and Republicans saw very similar results, with Republicans taking only a slight edge. However, the landscape changed dramatically when we looked at retweets by “highly-followed” individuals —

those with 10,000 or more followers. Republicans earned an average of 14 retweets from “highly-followed” individuals, while Democrats averaged just four. The difference here is one of quality, not quantity: while both parties were equally likely to be retweeted, Republicans were much more likely to have their messages spread by Twitter users with a large, established audience.

### “Highly-Followed RTs Per Handle”





## Follower Growth

*Senators exhibit faster growth than Representatives.*

Unlike the metrics explored above, there was no meaningful difference between Democrats and Republicans in raw follower growth per handle. Senators exhibited markedly faster growth than Representatives, though this may be due to a “snowball” effect that stems from having significantly more constituents. Members of Congress from Western states saw significantly higher growth than the other three regions, which were roughly equal.

## TweetLevel Influence

*House Democrats have work to do.*

A TweetLevel analysis of the 456 Congressional handles in our data set largely supported the above findings. Republicans, on average, exhibited an edge over Democrats, with the gap separating Senators’ and Representatives’ influence scores being even larger. Most influential according to TweetLevel were the Senate Republicans, followed by Senate Democrats and House Republicans, with House Democrats on the low end.

### TweetLevel Rankings

#### Influence

1. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I)
2. Rep. John Boehner (R)
3. Rep. Darrell Issa (R)
4. Sen. John McCain (R)
5. Rep. Eric Cantor (R)
6. Rep. Bob Latta (R)
7. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R)
8. Rep. Keith Ellison (D)
9. Rep. Kenny Marchant (R)
10. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R)

#### Popularity

1. Sen. John McCain (R)
2. Rep. John Boehner (R)
3. Sen. Jim DeMint (R)
4. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I)
5. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D)
6. Rep. Michele Bachmann (R)
7. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D)
8. Rep. Eric Cantor (R)
9. Rep. Ron Paul (R)
10. Rep. Darrell Issa (R)

#### Engagement

1. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I)
2. Sen. John McCain (R)
3. Rep. John Boehner (R)
4. Rep. Dennis Ross (R)
5. Rep. Keith Ellison (D)
6. Rep. Darrell Issa (R)
7. Sen. Mark Kirk (R)
8. Rep. Bob Latta (R)
9. Sen. Kristen Gillibrand (D)
10. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R)

#### Trust

1. Sen. John McCain (R)
2. Rep. Eric Cantor (R)
3. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I)
4. Sen. Al Franken (D)
5. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R)
6. Sen. Tom Coburn (R)
7. Sen. Claire McCaskill (D)
8. Rep. Keith Ellison (R)
9. Rep. Kenny Marchant (R)
10. Rep. Bob Latta (R)

Twitter rankings determined by [TweetLevel](#) on Dec. 2, 2011



# How Are Members Tweeting Differently?

Our findings show three key demographics affect Congressional performance on Twitter: party, chamber and geographic region. But Members of Congress don't have to be Republican, elected to the Senate or live in the Midwest to be successful on Twitter. We dug deeper into the quality of Members' tweets and identified controllable, adoptable behaviors that correlate with successful outcomes. We acknowledge that some deviation among our success metrics may be due to variables outside of Twitter behavior, and we have attempted to identify potential confounds – such as current events or party leadership roles – where appropriate.

“House Democrats are using new media tools like Twitter to connect with Americans in ways that a generation ago could only have been achieved by going door to door to talk to people.”

– Rep. John Larson (D-Conn.)

## The Parties

*Republicans tweet about legislation 3.5 times more than Democrats.*

Republicans outperformed Democrats on all of our success metrics. What did they do differently? For starters, Republicans tweeted more than Democrats – on average, 30 percent more. The gap was similar for static tweets, replies and retweets posted by Members of Congress.

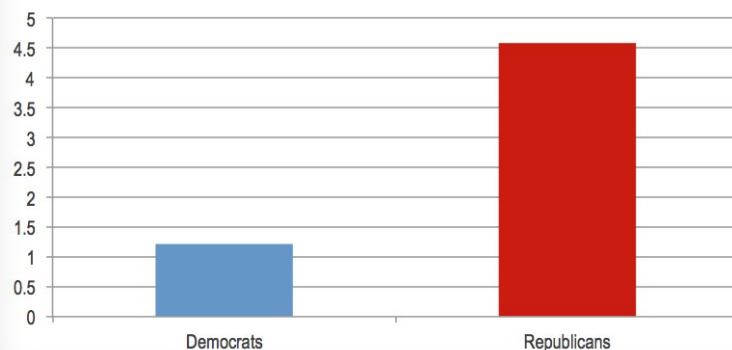
Republicans also tweeted 52 percent more links than Democrats and nearly 60 percent more links to rich multimedia like photos and videos. During our study, Republicans also tweeted an average of 75 hashtags, compared to just 54 for Democrats.

Finally, Republicans referenced specific pieces of legislation in their tweets 3.5 times more than their Democratic colleagues.

Bills referenced by Republican legislators included H.R. 822, concerning the right of Americans with permits to carry concealed firearms across state lines; H.R. 10 – the

REINS Act – which would impose Congressional review upon major regulations; and H.R. 2587, which would prohibit the National Labor Relations Board from ordering any employer to close, relocate, or transfer employment under any circumstance.

### Tweets About Legislation Per Handle

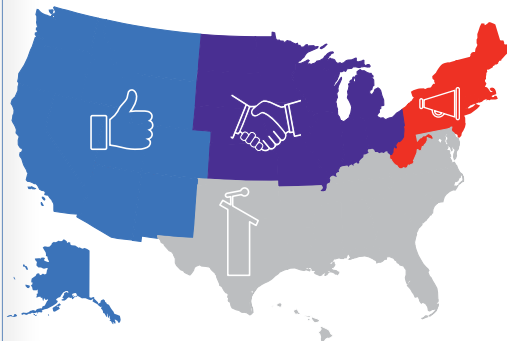


## The Chambers

*Senators post more static content than Representatives.*

Senators outperformed Representatives in terms of growth, mentions, “highly-followed” mentions and retweets. While some of those metrics could be due to their larger constituencies, Senators were also far more active than Representatives, averaging 147.6 tweets per handle compared to Democrats’ 125.7 tweets per handle. Senators also posted significantly more static content than Representatives, while Representatives posted more retweets and replies. Finally, Senators tweeted hashtags, links and links to rich multimedia more frequently than Representatives. This increased frequency was in line with the greater number of tweets posted by Senators.

## Twitter Usage Among Members of Congress from 4 U.S. Regions



## The Regions

*Members from the West use the most hashtags. Members from the Midwest tweet the most links.*

Members of Congress from the **West** displayed exceptional follower growth, received the most total mentions on average, and were mentioned by “highly-followed” individuals more frequently than the other regions. In our data set, Members from the West include such outlier handles as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.), and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), all of whom have significantly more followers and exposure than a typical Member of Congress. Nevertheless, Members from the West:

- Posted more retweets than any other region.
- Used more hashtags than any other region.

Members of Congress from the **Midwest** region generated follower engagements – or replies – more effectively than any other group. Members from the Midwest:

- Tweeted links more frequently than any other region.
- Tweeted links to rich multimedia more than any other region.
- Tweeted about specific pieces of legislation more than any other region.

Members of Congress from the **South** were least effective in their use of Twitter, according to our findings. These Members saw the slowest follower growth and the fewest overall mentions and retweets per handle, and ended in a virtual tie for last place in generating user replies. Members from the South:

- Posted more replies than any other region.
- Tweeted least frequently about specific pieces of legislation.

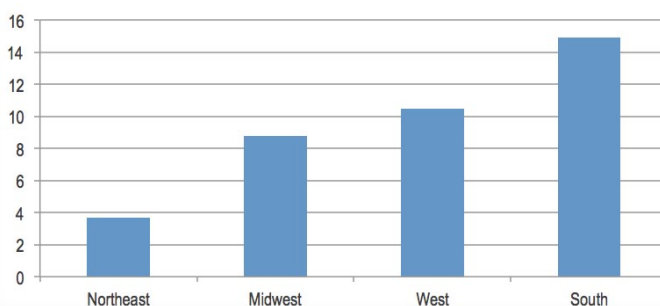
“I was recently named the ‘most frequent re-tweeter in Congress.’ I post a lot of my own ‘tweets,’ but there is no need to reinvent the wheel when one of my colleagues says it better than I could.”

– Rep. Steve Pearce (R-N.M.)

Members of Congress from the **Northeast** were by far the most amplified group. These Members received nearly twice as many retweets as those from the West, and roughly three times as many as Members from the Midwest and South. Members from the Northeast:

- Posted the fewest replies of any region.
- Posted the fewest retweets of any region.

## Reply Tweets Sent Per Handle



## The Timing

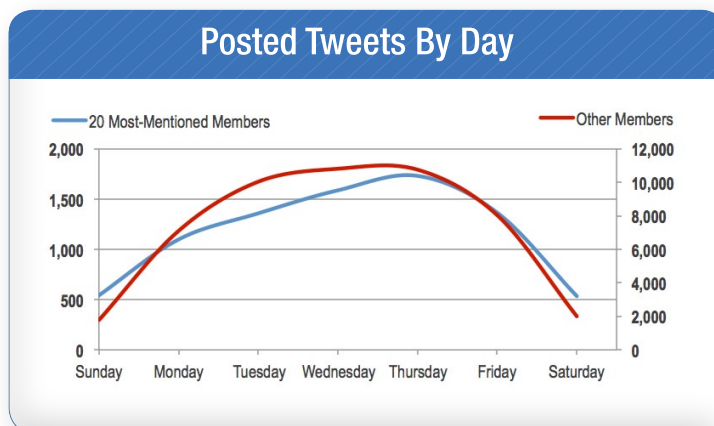
*Members who are mentioned most frequently tweet earlier in the day.*

The 20 Members of Congress who were mentioned most often exhibited slightly different behaviors from the rest of Congress. These “most-mentioned” Members tweeted earlier in the day, with activity increasing in the early morning and peaking just after 11:00 AM EST. A smaller spike in activity occurred just after 2:00 PM EST. The other 436 Members tended to tweet slightly later in the day. Although tweet activity among these Members also displayed a spike around 11:00 AM EST, peak activity occurred just after 3:00 PM EST.

*Members who are mentioned most frequently tweet later in the week.*

The same 20 Members of Congress who were mentioned most tweeted toward the end of the work week. Activity among these Members peaked on Thursday, whereas the rest of Congress tweeted consistently from Tuesday through Thursday. Accordingly, the “most-mentioned” Members were less likely to post on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday than the remainder of Congress.

Interestingly, the 20 “most-mentioned” Members of Congress sent a far greater percentage of their tweets on weekend days. These Members posted 13.1 percent of their tweets on Saturday and Sunday, while the rest of Congress posted just 7.5 percent of their tweets over the weekend.

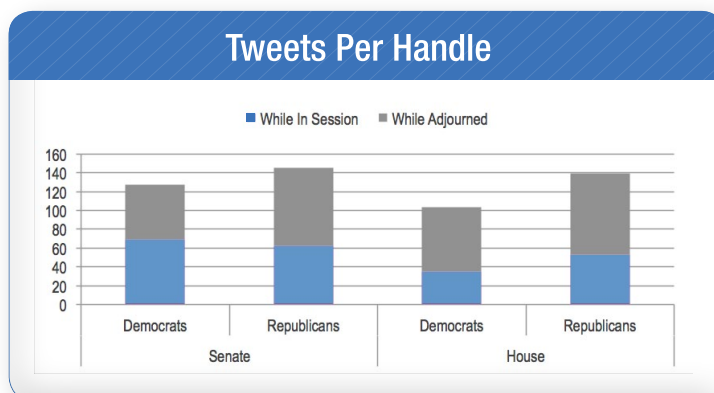


## Tweeting While in Session

*Senate Democrats are more prone to tweet while in session than while adjourned.*

Tweeting while Congress is in session is not uncommon, though Congress as a whole was more likely to tweet while adjourned. In the House, Representatives from both parties were roughly half as likely to tweet when the House was in session. Senators – who outperformed Representatives in terms of growth, mentions, “highly-followed” mentions and retweets – were less likely to wait for Congress to adjourn before pulling out their smartphones or tablets. Senators tweeted only slightly less frequently while in session as when adjourned. Digging further into the data, we found that Senate Democrats were actually slightly more prone to tweet while in session than while adjourned.

Despite a willingness to “tweet from the floor,” Members of Congress were extremely unlikely to tweet just before or after a vote. This held true in both the House and the Senate, and across party lines. Fewer than 2 percent of all tweets published by Members of Congress were posted within 30 minutes of a vote.



# Best Practices for Members: The Yeas and Nays of the Congressional Twitterverse.

Former House Speaker Thomas “Tip” O’Neill famously coined the phrase, “All politics is local.” This year, 100 years after his birth, one has to wonder what Speaker O’Neill would have thought about Twitter. For those serving in Congress, this digital mode of communication provides the public with direct access to Members and their staff, which speaks directly to the spirit of Speaker O’Neill’s quote.

Edelman’s 2011 Capital Staffers Index<sup>51</sup> demonstrated a significant increase in social media use in governments across the globe. In particular, the 2011 survey found a 30-point increase in the number of global capital staffers who consider Twitter effective in reaching constituents and influencing policy. Staffers reported that nearly 53 percent<sup>52</sup> of members of Parliament and Congress now use Twitter, up from only 38 percent just a year earlier. Importantly, 41 percent reported growth in constituents’ use of Twitter to reach lawmakers – almost a 600 percent increase from just 7 percent in 2009.

“Social networking tools have given us a 2.0 democracy; letting people participate in the legislative process at all times and giving Members of Congress the instant ability to connect and engage with constituents.”

– Rep. Bob Latta (R-Ohio)

Based on the Capital Staffers Index and the results of this analysis, we recommend that Members of Congress incorporate Twitter in their communications strategy. We also suggest the following Ten Twitter Best Practices:

1. **Tweet regularly.** Successful Twitter users in the U.S. Congress tweet more often than those who get little engagement or amplification from the platform. Although the correlation between tweets posted and mentions received was not incredibly strong, Members who tweeted 3 to 4 times per day were among the most successful across our metrics.
2. **Tweet links to relevant and compelling content.** Links alone do not cause amplification or engagement, but links – particularly to rich media – can be an effective method of inspiring replies.
3. **Use hashtags.** Hashtags are tied to amplification – or retweets – and place tweets in front of a larger audience that is tracking conversation around a keyword.
4. **Tweet about specific legislation.** In most cases, Members who tweeted about specific legislation received more replies from users, including replies from “highly-followed” users.
5. **Retweet other users.** While retweets didn’t help Members boost personal amplification, they did correlate with increased follower growth.
6. **Be strategic with replies.** Engaging in a two-way conversation and replying to followers is generally accepted as a Twitter best practice, but replies sent by Members of Congress did not correlate with our success metrics. This is likely because replies are only visible to Twitter users who follow both handles – the handle tweeting and the handle being replied to. If Members of Congress want to generate more engagement with and amplification of their replies, they should include a symbol before the username they are replying to. Periods, commas and slashes are regularly used to make replies visible to all followers.
7. **Tweet early in the day.** Activity among the most-mentioned Members of Congress peaked before noon EST. It is possible that these handles benefited from being the first to comment on the events and issues of the day.

“I use Twitter because it permits me to make an important point in at least one part of the national debate that could end up being considered by a huge audience.”

– Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.)

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.edelmandigital.com/2011/12/07/2011-capital-staffers-index/>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.edelmandigital.com/2011/12/09/friday-five-2011-capital-staffers-index/>

8. **Tweet during the latter half of the work week.** Activity among the most-mentioned Members of Congress peaked on Thursday. Wednesday was the second-most-active day.
9. **Don't be afraid to tweet over the weekend.** The most-mentioned Members of Congress were more likely to tweet on Saturday and Sunday than other legislators. Overall, Twitter usage is lower during weekend days than during the workweek; Members' tweets may be relatively more visible during this apparent vacuum of activity.
10. **Tweet while in session.** Twitter is a great way to shed light on and humanize the legislative process. While tweeting should not be the priority, Members should not hesitate to share information about bills, votes or testimony from the floor.

Ultimately, the best use of Twitter comes from developing an authentic voice. Adam Sharp, senior manager of government, news and social innovation at Twitter, recently credited effective Twitter use with "Being yourself, not just having it be a very regimented stream of press releases. These are things that will create value in the account and build a community of people who want to help you and advance your message and fan out that content."<sup>53</sup>

### Twitter Wonders

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) has been a long-time advocate for Twitter<sup>54</sup> and earned a great deal of attention for her personal use of the platform. She's shared creamed spinach recipes<sup>55</sup> with her followers and even tweeted last May that she was "tired of looking and feeling fat."<sup>56</sup>

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.) has helped lead the charge for new media adoption in the House. In a statement provided to Edelman, she said, "You have to be authentic and human, getting beyond the talking points and sound bites. . . . For instance, when my husband Brian and I found out we were expecting our second child (Grace Blossom) we wanted to share the good news with the world. So I sent a tweet announcing my pregnancy." The response was "strong, immediate, and overwhelmingly positive," and "generated a lot of interest" in how the Congresswoman balances her work and her family life. As a result, she continues to share her personal side with the world.

### Twitter Blunders

In addition to celebrated successes on Twitter, politicians have also had their fair share of gaffes<sup>57</sup> on the platform. While Twitter gives lawmakers an unparalleled opportunity<sup>58</sup> to speak directly to voters, the immediacy of the platform has made some politicians vulnerable to unwanted criticisms.

From Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) highly publicized interactions with MTV reality star Snooki<sup>59</sup> to the profane tweet<sup>60</sup> published on then Sen. Chris Dodd's (D-Conn.) account, Twitter brings new possibilities for high-profile, public missteps.

Former Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.) tweeted "Just landed in Baghdad"<sup>61</sup> during a top-secret trip as part of the House Intelligence Committee, taking his senior staff by surprise and unintentionally revealing confidential information about the trip.

### The Weiner Scandal

In May 2011, Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) mistakenly published a sexually suggestive photograph on Twitter,<sup>62</sup> unraveling a history of secret online exchanges.

Although Weiner originally pointed fingers at hackers, the release of additional incriminating photos and a digital trail of his online exchanges made Weiner's actions increasingly difficult to deny.

At a time when more Americans get their news online<sup>63</sup> than from newspapers, and when social media has decentralized coverage, Weiner's team failed to control or even impact the online discussion.

He resigned from Congress on June 16, 2011, becoming the first Congressman to step down over indiscretions on Twitter.

<sup>53</sup> <http://soundcloud.com/personaldemocracy/how-to-use-twitter-for>

<sup>54</sup> <http://clairecmc.tumblr.com/post/100898280/why-i-tweet>

<sup>55</sup> <https://twitter.com/#!/clairecmc/status/1331650785>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/10/19/earlyshow/main20122470.shtml>

<sup>57</sup> [http://thestir.cafemom.com/in\\_the\\_news/121111/top\\_10\\_embarrassing\\_twitter\\_gaffes](http://thestir.cafemom.com/in_the_news/121111/top_10_embarrassing_twitter_gaffes)

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.edelmanandigital.com/2011/06/20/red-white-and-tweet-a-look-at-politicians-on-twitter/>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.mediaite.com/online/dear-snooki-love-john-mccain/>

<sup>60</sup> <http://washingtonscene.thehill.com/in-the-know/36-news/7115-dodds-major-twitter-gaffe-u-love-torturing-me-w-this-s>

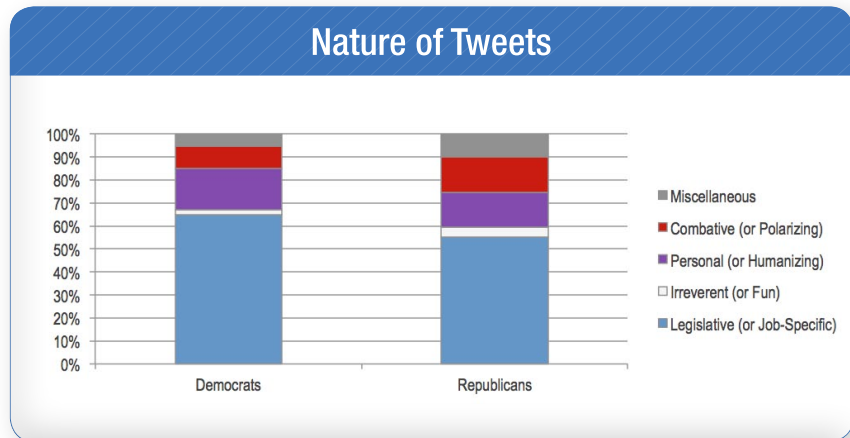
<sup>61</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/06/gop-congressman-breached\\_n\\_164809.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/06/gop-congressman-breached_n_164809.html)

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/07/nyregion/timeline-of-weiner-case.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/07/nyregion/timeline-of-weiner-case.html?_r=2)

<sup>63</sup> <http://mashable.com/2011/03/15/online-versus-newspaper-news/>

## The Nature of Tweets

Members of Congress aren't just tweeting about politics. To explore the nature of their tweets, we took a representative sample of tweets from each political party and assigned them to one of five categories: Legislative, Combative, Irreverent, Personal and Miscellaneous. While the majority of Members' tweets – between half and two-thirds – dealt with legislation, official events or political issues of the day, a significant portion of Congressional tweets touched upon other subjects.



Around 1 in 8 tweets in our data set were politically combative, defined as casting the opposition in a negative light and polarizing the conversation along party lines. Members devoted roughly 1 in 6 tweets to human interest stories, such as remembering 9/11, saluting the troops, and acknowledging birthdays and holidays. Additionally, the data showed Members of Congress were not afraid to use their official Twitter handles to tweet about fun or irreverent topics. For example, a number of Members tweeted in support of their preferred professional sports teams. The remainder of tweets – which included “Follow Fridays” and news articles from Members' constituencies – fell into the catch-all Miscellaneous category.

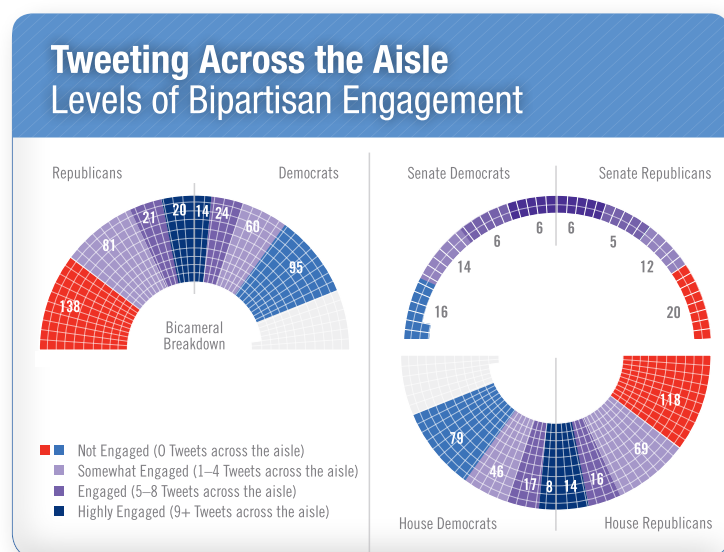
## Tweeting with Three Core Audiences

Throughout our analysis, interesting case studies arose that did not directly correlate with our success metrics, but still provided insight into how Members of Congress are using Twitter. In particular, we looked at how Members use Twitter to communicate with each other, with the Obama Administration and with members of the media.

### Tweeting “Across the Aisle”

*51 percent of tweets between political parties are collaborative.*

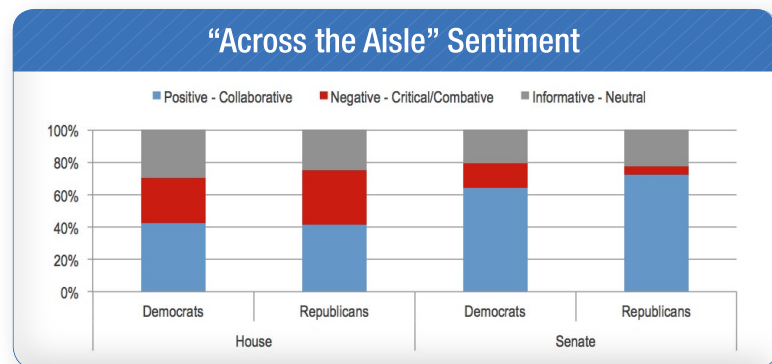
Beyond sharing news with their constituents, Members of Congress use Twitter to communicate with and “tweet across the aisle” to the political opposition. Around 49 percent of the handles in our data set reached across the virtual “aisle” from Republicans to Democrats and vice versa. Of those handles, 31.1 were somewhat engaged across the aisle – defined as one to four tweets – and around 7.5 percent were highly engaged – defined as nine or more tweets to a Member of the opposite political party. These “across the aisle” exchanges represented about 2 percent of the total tweets analyzed.





We took a deeper look at the sentiment of the “across the aisle” tweets and defined tweets as either positive/collaborative, negative/critical or neutral/informative. Overall, 51 percent of the tweets were collaborative. When looking by chamber, House Republicans’ tweets across the aisle broke down to 41 percent collaborative, 34 percent critical and 25 percent informative. House Democrats’ tweets across the aisle were slightly more positive and neutral, with 42 percent collaborative, 28 percent critical and 21 percent informative.

In the Senate, Republicans were more positive than Democrats. Senate Republicans’ tweets across the aisle were 73 percent collaborative and 5 percent critical, compared to 64 percent collaborative and 15 percent critical for Senate Democrats.



We also explored the impacts of age and tenure on Members’ likelihood to tweet across the aisle and the sentiment of such tweets. We found that the 40 to 49 age group reached across the aisle most often, averaging 3.4 tweets per handle. Additionally, 47 percent of that age group’s tweets “across the aisle” were collaborative. In terms of tenure, the least and most tenured Members were most likely to tweet across the aisle. Members with 1 to 5 years in Congress averaged 2.6 tweets across the aisle and Members with more than 36 years in Congress – of which our data set had eight – averaged 4.4 tweets across the aisle. These groups were 52 percent collaborative and 40 percent collaborative, respectively. This lends credence to the notion that the newest Members of Congress are hopeful they can change the fractured institution, while the most tenured Members reminisce about the bipartisan collaboration of years past.

## Commander-In-Tweets

*Senate Republicans are more than three times as likely to tweet Presidential keywords.*

During 2011, the Obama administration bolstered its Twitter presence and used the platform in new and engaging ways to communicate with voters, the media and Capitol Hill. Our analysis of Members’ tweets showed that 8.1 percent of tweets referenced presidential keywords – defined as “Obama,” “White House,” “President” and “POTUS” – or presidential Twitter handles – either @BarackObama or @WhiteHouse. Overall, Members were almost seven times more likely to tweet presidential keywords than to mention either handle. Looking at these interactions by party, Republicans tweeted presidential keywords almost twice as often as Democrats. This difference was even more obvious in the Senate, where Senate Republicans were more than three times as likely to tweet presidential keywords as their Democratic colleagues, averaging 15.1 keyword tweets per handle.

“As Twitter continues to evolve, my goal is to help members continue engaging constituents, our colleagues and the social Web. If we’re successful, the result will be a more open, transparent and inclusive Congress.”

– Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.)

President Obama’s end-of-July #compromise campaign<sup>64</sup> provides an interesting case study of Congressional interactions with the White House on Twitter. During this campaign, @BarackObama tweeted the names of all Republican Senators and Representatives, and encouraged followers to contact them and urge support for “a bipartisan solution to the deficit crisis.”

Initially, this seemed to backfire on the president. He was accused of “Twitter spam”<sup>65</sup> and the @BarackObama account lost roughly 36,000 followers in the immediate aftermath of the campaign. President Obama recovered about 70 percent of those followers, however, and went on to become the third individual<sup>66</sup> – trailing only musicians Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber – and the first politician to reach 10 million Twitter followers, doing so on Sept. 12, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> <http://simplymeasured.com/blog/2011/08/president-obamas-compromise-campaign/>

<sup>65</sup> <http://mashable.com/2011/07/29/obama-compromise-campaign/>

<sup>66</sup> [http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/barack-obama-twitter-10-million-followers\\_b13599](http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/barack-obama-twitter-10-million-followers_b13599)



## Tweetstream Media

*"If it's the difference between a statement at 4 or a tweet at 2, I want the tweet."*

Members of the media are a key audience for Congressional tweets. In fact, Edelman's 2011 Capital Staffers Index<sup>67</sup> found that 52 percent of the accounts followed by Parliament and Congress belong to members of the media. Our analysis found that the top five media-oriented handles mentioned by Congressional Democrats, in order, were @YouTube, @msnbc, @cspan, @AP and @washingtonpost. Republicans favored @WSJ, @FoxNews, @YouTube, @FoxBusiness and @cspan. These trends support the common perception that MSNBC and Fox News represent the left and right ends of the political spectrum.

Republicans	Democrats
Top five media-oriented Twitter handles mentioned by Republicans.	Top five media-oriented Twitter handles mentioned by Democrats.
 @WSJ	 @YouTube
 @FoxNews	 @msnbc
 @YouTube	 @cspan
 @FoxBusiness	 @AP
 @cspan	 @washingtonpost

Increasingly, Members' Twitter accounts are viewed as go-to resources for Congressional news and reactions. Members of the media are listening on Twitter, and Congressional tweets are regularly incorporated into more traditional media coverage.

For example, Yahoo! White House reporter Olivier Knox,<sup>68</sup> a former Congress/Political Correspondent for Agence France-Presse, helped break the story about a secret CODEL trip to Afghanistan after seeing an errant tweet on then Rep. Pete Hoekstra's (R-Mich.) account. Although Knox soon received a call from an angry staffer about pressing forward on the story, he argued that "If Hoekstra put it on Twitter, it's safe to cover." In an interview with Edelman, Knox explained that he follows lawmakers on Twitter "because they announce things – sometimes things they're not supposed to or well before they put out a traditional, written statement." Knox said, "If it's a choice between a statement at 4 or a tweet at 2, I want the tweet."

Ben Smith<sup>69</sup> of BuzzFeed recently wrote about the importance of Twitter<sup>70</sup> in political reporting. "Twitter has become political reporters' and junkies' front page: It's faster and more comprehensive than any wire service or website, because it includes them all, along with the voices of newsmakers and reporters who make and break news there before it hits the old Web," Smith wrote.

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.edelmandigital.com/2011/12/07/2011-capital-staffers-index/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://twitter.com/#!/OKnox>

<sup>69</sup> <https://twitter.com/#!/buzzfeedben>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeedpolitics/politics-from-the-twitter-firehose>

# Transmedia Storytelling

As the modern media landscape continues to evolve, there is increasing overlap between multiple forms of media: A tweet shows up in a newspaper article; an infographic – or piece of owned media – is embedded by a blogger; a Facebook movement is covered by the nightly news.

In this environment, Twitter cannot be viewed as a silo on its own. Instead, Twitter must be part of a coordinated communications strategy. It is crucial that elected officials understand the relationship between various channels in order to achieve their desired communication and engagement objectives. At Edelman, we refer to this approach as Transmedia Storytelling, and have divided information sources into four primary areas that live within a “Media Cloverleaf.”



The first leaf consists of “Traditional” media, which are the print, radio and television channels that most people have come to trust and value over the years based on reach, market penetration, quality reporting, journalistic standards, editorial integrity and brand name recognition. Many of the online conversations about news, politics and current events are generated from stories that begin in traditional outlets such as the Washington Post, C-SPAN, CQ Roll Call, CNN, National Journal, Fox News, NPR, Associated Press, The Hill and MSNBC.

The “Hybrid” leaf contains media websites that operate similarly to traditional channels in that they often employ editors and reporters from the ranks of mainstream media. However, hybrid sites can be more nimble since their content exists primarily online, allowing for real-time updates. Examples include The Huffington Post, The Daily Caller and Politico.

Twitter falls in the “Social Media” leaf. News and conversations can be effectively augmented via social channels, including Facebook, YouTube, Foursquare, Path, Tumblr and Flickr. Social media allows individuals and organizations alike to leverage the power of online communities and their personal social graphs.

Finally, the last leaf represents “Owned” channels. These are official websites – like Speaker.gov<sup>71</sup> – and other digital assets, such as mobile applications or infographics, that are fully owned and controlled by the company, individual or organization. Owned channels give organizations and individuals an opportunity for curation and control, allowing for unique perspectives that might not be included in social media or reflected in traditional or hybrid coverage.

Content and search lie at center of the Media Cloverleaf and are important parts of a comprehensive communications strategy that clearly defines program objectives, target audiences, and desired results. It is imperative for elected officials, constituents and members of the media to understand the flow of news and information within all channels in order to effectively communicate messages, engage core audiences, and influence opinions online.

## A Changing Landscape

The shifting tides of political communication can be seen most evidently in Twitter's own business changes and the 2012 election.

In the past year and a half, Twitter has more than quadrupled its D.C. staff<sup>72</sup> and the team recently launched @gov<sup>73</sup> to track “creative and effective uses of Twitter for civic engagement.” Last September,<sup>74</sup> Twitter began accepting paid political advertising for promoted tweets, promoted trends and promoted accounts<sup>75</sup> – all of which are designated with a purple icon and information about who purchased the ad. In the weeks and months ahead, the Twitter team plans to begin using @gov to share political case studies and best practices.<sup>76</sup> They are also compiling an email distribution list to share updates with the government sphere.

“Constituents now want direct access to their elected officials at all levels. The American public now expects a new media government – one that responds nimbly to concern, something that was hard to imagine even five years ago.”

– Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.)

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.speaker.gov/>

<sup>72</sup> [http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1111/Twitter\\_hires\\_Finn\\_in\\_political\\_push.html?showall](http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1111/Twitter_hires_Finn_in_political_push.html?showall)

<sup>73</sup> <https://twitter.com/#!/gov>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.techi.com/2011/09/twitter-cashes-in-on-the-2012-election/>

<sup>75</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/11/facebook-google-twitter-election-2012\\_n\\_1005208.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/11/facebook-google-twitter-election-2012_n_1005208.html)

<sup>76</sup> <http://soundcloud.com/personaldemocracy/how-to-use-twitter-for>

In the 2012 presidential election, Twitter has played a role from the very beginning. Republican challengers to President Barack Obama have flocked to social media in an attempt to replicate his 2008 social media success.<sup>77</sup> Republican candidates Mitt Romney<sup>78</sup> and Newt Gingrich<sup>79</sup> even promoted their 2012 candidacy announcements via Twitter. Throughout this primary season, traditional media have looked to Twitter for insights into user sentiment<sup>80</sup> about candidates, follower growth, and volume of candidate mentions.<sup>81</sup> Some have credited social media with keeping the GOP primary going and creating strong factions within the Republican Party.<sup>82</sup> As election season continues, we expect to see Congressional campaigns use Twitter to promote endorsements and share pictures and videos from the campaign trail, as well as breaking news and posting reactions to primary and debate results.

Given the rapidly changing media landscape, political use of Twitter will continue to evolve in the coming years and even the coming months. Based on our interviews and analysis, we expect to see even more media reliance on Members' Twitter accounts as content sources. Additionally, we believe Twitter's role in political discourse will soon be cemented and the platform will be relied upon to provide a real-time temperature reading of Congressional debates. Finally, we expect to see increased tweets "across the aisle" and to the White House as Members of Congress become more familiar with – and thus transparent and conversational on – the Twitter platform.

This analysis provides only a snapshot of Congressional Twitter use and Members' of Congress behaviors on Twitter. Conversations on Twitter are now an inevitable part of the public square, a place for discussion and debate over politics and policy, and as such deserve continual study. As Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.) said in a statement provided to Edelman, "The usage of new media in government is a question of whether you will harness [the political] conversation."

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.edelman.com/image/insights/content/social%20pulpit%20-%20barack%20obamas%20social%20media%20toolkit%201.09.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> <http://mashable.com/2011/06/02/mitt-romney-announces-presidential/>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1386106/Newt-Gingrich-formally-announces-2012-presidential-bid-Twitter.html>

<sup>80</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/election-2012/post/atmentionmachine-tracks-the-2012-candidates-whos-up-whos-down-on-twitter/2011/12/20/gIQAHC9s70\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/election-2012/post/atmentionmachine-tracks-the-2012-candidates-whos-up-whos-down-on-twitter/2011/12/20/gIQAHC9s70_blog.html)

<sup>81</sup> <http://www.buzzfeed.com/zekejmiller/santorum-wins-the-day-on-twitter>

<sup>82</sup> <http://techpresident.com/news/21841/how-social-media-keeping-gop-primary-going>

# Appendix

## Expanded Methodology

### Data Sources

Twitter data for this study, including all tweets, timestamps, follower counts and any associated metadata were provided by Simply Measured. Twitter influence scores were provided by TweetLevel,<sup>83</sup> a proprietary tool created and owned by Edelman. The times and dates of votes in the House and Senate, as well as the times and dates during which the House and Senate were in session or adjourned, were obtained via the Congressional Record<sup>84</sup> on Thomas.gov, the Roll Call Vote Summary<sup>85</sup> on Senate.gov and the Roll Call Vote Summary<sup>86</sup> from the House Clerk's Office. Publicly available data points – such as birthdates, party affiliation, tenure and geographic region, as designated by the Census Bureau<sup>87</sup> – were acquired via Wikipedia and confirmed using third-party sources as necessary.

Simply Measured collected tweets by and tweets mentioning each of the 456 handles in this study. Our data set spans 112 days, from Sept. 2, 2011 through Dec. 25, 2011. Data detailing the volume of retweets and replies in response to Members' individual tweets were also provided by Simply Measured. Twitter assigns each published tweet a unique "Tweet ID." If a user clicks "retweet" or "reply" in response to that tweet, the resulting tweet is given a "Retweet ID" or "Reply ID," which is the Tweet ID of the original tweet (that sparked further engagement). By matching these numbers, we can calculate the performance of individual pieces of content.

Edelman solicited statements from the following Members of Congress: Rep. Michael Honda (D- Calif.), Rep. John Larson (D-Conn.), Rep. Bob Latta (R-Ohio), Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), Rep. Steve Pearce (R-N.M.), Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.). The team also interviewed political correspondent Olivier Knox on Dec. 9, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> <http://tweetlevel.edelman.com/>

<sup>84</sup> <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/LegislativeData.php?&n=Record>

<sup>85</sup> [http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/vote\\_menu\\_112\\_1.htm](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/vote_menu_112_1.htm)

<sup>86</sup> <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/index.asp>

<sup>87</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_regions\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_regions_of_the_United_States)

## Glossary

### Reach

The maximum potential audience of a given Twitter user. Unless otherwise noted, this is synonymous with follower count. For groups, reach is the sum of group members' follower counts. This indicates "potential reach," as there are likely to be some common followers among members of a group.

### Mention

Any tweet that contains the Twitter handle of the user in question. "Mention" is an umbrella term that includes replies, retweets and static tweets.

### Reply

A tweet that begins with the @ symbol. These are only visible to users who follow both users – the user mentioned, and the user tweeting.

### Retweet

A tweet that repeats the message of another user. Retweets are denoted with the phrases "RT @username" or "via @username." They are visible to all of a user's followers and can also be posted via Twitter's retweet button.

### Static Tweet

A tweet that does not reply to or retweet the message of another user. Static tweets may mention another handle and are visible to all of a user's followers.

### Hashtag

A tag embedded in a tweet using the # symbol that identifies the keyword or topic of a tweet and makes a tweet searchable as part of a larger conversation.

### Rich Multimedia

A term used for tweets that link to photo or video content. These were identified by Web domain, and included the following: YouTube, Ustream, yfrog, c-span.org, Twitpic and flickr. We also included the "short link" variantsyoutu.be, ustre.am, cs.pn, and flic.kr.

## Qualitative Criteria

The team used the following qualitative criteria when tagging the nature of Members' tweets:

**Legislative (or Job-Specific)** – Defined as tweets that mention specific pieces of legislation or issues that were up for debate at the time. This tag is appropriate for political collaboration and also applies to events and public appearances.

**Irreverent (or Joking)** – Defined as tweets that are humorous or lighthearted in nature. This tag applies to tweets that stray from the otherwise serious tone of political discourse.

**Personal (or Humanizing)** – Defined as tweets that seek to make the Member of Congress seem more human. These tweets could be about family, friends, disaster relief, and national days of remembrance – anything that tugs at the heartstrings.

**Combative (or Polarizing)** – Defined as tweets that attack the political opposition or seek to polarize issues into Democrats vs. Republicans or Left vs. Right.

**Miscellaneous** – Created as a catch-all for any tweets that didn't fit the above categories.

Specific to "tweeting across the aisle," the team used the following qualitative scoring system:

**Positive/Collaborative** – Defined as tweets that focus on collaborative efforts between legislators from different political parties. These could be joint event appearances, co-sponsored bills, positive reactions to actions taken by the other party, or attempts to reach out for discussion or compromise on an issue.

**Negative/Critical** – Defined as critical or satirical tweets that portray the political opposition as slow to act, directly responsible for negative outcomes, actively in favor of such negative outcomes, or otherwise foolish or absurd.

**Neutral/Informational** – Defined as tweets that are politically neutral or purely informative in nature. These might concern event dates and times, information on scheduling, or bills and issues that could not conceivably see political opposition (such as the death of a public figure, birth of a child, or honoring military veterans).

## Outliers and Edge Cases

Throughout our analysis, two cohorts emerged as clear outliers, posting exceptional scores in almost all of our success metrics. These groups were the Members of Congress aged 70 to 79, and Members of Congress with 21 to 25 years of tenure. The results for these two groups were skewed by a few exceptional individuals.

The 70 to 79 age cohort included many of the most effective and popular Twitter users in Congress, including some who occupy leadership roles within their parties. Among these Members were Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.).

Follower count provides a tangible example of this cohort's impact on demographic averages. The average Member of Congress on Twitter had 11,369 followers, while the five individuals noted above averaged 419,669 followers (skewed heavily by Sen. McCain's 1.7 million followers, easily the highest total in Congress).

Similarly, a few notable Members of Congress have 21 to 25 years of tenure. This group also includes McCain, Pelosi and Reid, who skew the results in a manner similar to their age cohort.

## Additional Considerations

The digital landscape is fast-paced and constantly shifting. Numerous times during this study, we discovered that Senators and Representatives changed their Twitter handles, or had multiple Twitter accounts. We made a sincere effort to only include government accounts, drawing a line between official accounts and campaign accounts, which aren't subject to the same internal guidelines. We were unable to identify a central database for the Twitter identities of Members of Congress. To the best of our abilities, we kept up with emerging trends, monitored Twitter lists that aggregate Members' handles, and looked for headlines about Members joining Twitter. It is possible that some data points collected during the writing of this paper are no longer accurate. Likewise, it is possible that there are users or tweets that were not included in our data set.

Two current Members of the United States Senate, Sens. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), serve as Independents. Although Independents often caucus with the Democrats, we did not consider them Members of the Democratic Party for the purpose of this study.

We normalized our data by Twitter handle. This decision was made to counteract potential skews from a larger political party, chamber, age group, etc. Future studies may choose to normalize by tweet.

For the nature of tweets, we took two random samples of the data set – one from Democrats and one from Republicans. Each resulting sample had 384 Twitter handles with a confidence interval (margin of error) of five and confidence level of 95 percent. Thus, we can say with 95 percent certainty that each of those percentages in the “Nature of Tweets” graph is within +/- 5 percent of the value we would obtain if we scored all 50,000+ tweets.

Finally, we acknowledge that many Members of Congress rely on their staff members to maintain their official Twitter accounts. Tweets may be pre-written and scheduled throughout the workweek, and a Member may never personally engage in direct interactions on Twitter.

## About Our Team

### Edelman

This report was authored by David Almay ([@almacy](#)), Kurt Hauptman ([@ninjakurtle](#)) and Marcia Newbert ([@mnewbert](#)) in Edelman's Washington, D.C. office. Edelman is the world's largest public relations firm, with 63 offices and more than 4,200 employees worldwide, as well as affiliates in more than 30 cities. Edelman was named Advertising Age's top-ranked PR firm of the decade in 2009 and one of its “A-List Agencies” in both 2010 and 2011; Adweek's “2011 PR Agency of the Year;” PRWeek's “2011 Large PR Agency of the Year;” and The Holmes Report's “2011 Global Agency of the Year.” Edelman was named one of the “Best Places to Work” by Advertising Age in 2010 and among Glassdoor's top five “2011 Best Places to Work.” Edelman owns specialty firms Blue (advertising), StrategyOne (research), Ruth (brands + experiences), DJE Science (medical education/publishing and science communications), MATTER (sports, sponsorship, and entertainment), and Edelman Consulting. Visit <http://www.edelman.com> for more information.

### Simply Measured

Simply Measured makes it easy to get social media data and create beautiful, custom reports in Excel and online. Simply Measured is unlike any other social media analytics tool you have seen in the past. Rather than a rigid web dashboard, Simply Measured gives you complete control of all your social media data in Excel. No more compiling data from disparate sources and spending hours trying to make sense of it. Simply Measured aggregates social media data from over a dozen sources into one easy format with over 20 beautiful reports. Excel-based reports let you analyze and explore data in the format you love. Web views make it easy to access data on the fly and share reports with your team. And you can publish everything to PowerPoint with the click of a button. Simply Measured tools are trusted by more than 20,000 users worldwide, Fortune 500 brands, and top digital agencies. Start falling in love with data again at <http://simplymeasured.com> or by following [@simplymeasured](#) on Twitter.



## Ruth Brands + Experiences

Edelman's Ruth Brands + Experiences is a creative marketing firm that specializes in 360 activation-driven campaigns that focus on immersive, experiential and personal audience engagement. We solve business problems and drive sales with concept-based consumer touch point marketing, cinematic content, and fresh graphic expression. We're translators across channels, platforms, and disciplines within a full marketing suite of services. Visit <http://www.ruth.us.com/> for more information.

## TweetLevel

TweetLevel is a Twitter measurement tool created by [@jonnybentwood](#) at Edelman. Using a specially developed [algorithm](#), TweetLevel tracks tweeters in any language and in any country, and scores them according to their influence, using 40 distinct metrics. People who rank highest are those who create unique ideas that are then amplified, and those who engage with their followers by providing informative and relevant content. TweetLevel, and its underlying algorithm, differs from existing tools in notable ways: TweetLevel has distinct metrics for "idea starters" vs. "amplifiers." TweetLevel distinguishes between people who are "idea starters"—the people who originate ideas or are first to surface news—and the "amplifiers" who spread other peoples' ideas. Both are influential, but TweetLevel recognizes and emphasizes their influence differently. Additionally, TweetLevel gives higher rankings to people who engage in conversation vs. simply post their views. TweetLevel analyzes every tweet to help match brands and issues with the right people, increasing the efficiency and relevance of influencer outreach and engagement efforts.