Introduction

mixed-method study of how the spread of opinion news stories differ from the spread of non-opinioin news stories on twitter.

(significance)

contributions: data collection experience (what worked and what didn't work

(research questions)

Paint a picture for the making and responses to opinion stories on social media (from the perspective social media moderators and engagement of Twitter users)

How can news agencies attract eye balls while facilitating healthy discourse on social media?

Related Works

(see slidetrack)

(Mixed) Methods

Definitions and Limitations

The Opinion v.s. Non-Opinion Dichotomy

In reality, this dichotomy does not exist. Simply looking at the front page of the Washington Post website tells us that news story can be categorized as politics, opinions, sports, etc. This

categorization scheme varies across news agencies as well. In the context of social media, many news agencies use specific textual signifiers to categorize the stories in the posts. Again, taking the Twitter account of the Washington Post, stories are divided into news (no label),

opinion, and analysis. The New York Times and Al Jazeera English use other kinds of labels. Sometimes, big agencies have Twitter accounts specifically dedicated to opinion stories.

In this work, we want to explore **how stories with strong opinions generate different patterns of spread and engagement from those with a more objective tone and voice**. We are using the opinion v.s. non-opinion dichotomy not because these are only two types of news stories, but because the opinion tag tends to be a good indicator of whether the linked story expresses individual opinions.

We recognize the limitation that although the precense of the opinion tag is an accurate indicator of opinion stories, the lack of it does not give much information—whether the story belongs to any of the other common categories of news, or whether it uses a more subjective tone or objective tone.

To compensate for this limitation, we use a combination of methods in our analysis, instead of only using large-scale statistical analysis. In the statistical analysis, we separate the opinion and non-opinion stories based on the existence of the opinion tag (of the specific news agency) and make comparisons. In our observations, we look closely at specific tweets and manually identify the content and perspective of the news story, whether it is an opinion piece or something else.

Another limitation exists in that the opinion tag in a tweet tells us more about how people perceive the tweet than about how people perceive the article. Twitter users often read and respond to the tweet without actually reading the article, so their engagement patterns with the tweet not necessarily reflect their engagement with the article itself. This is an inevitable issue with news on social media.

Considerations around Partisanship

Trying to move beyond a proof of partisanship. The prevalence of social media research on partisanship.

Statistics and data collection

earlier attempts

i.   using sdentify specific events and news agency

ii. for each <event, agency> pair, select a set of opinion tweets and non-opinion tweets

iii. query the retweet/quote/reply network of each of these tweets

This didn't work because 1) the same agency rarely posts both opinion and non-opinion tweets relating to the same event, and 2) it is very difficult to query the retweet/quote/reply network of a specific tweet using the standard Twitter API's. Thus, we resorted to the following method.

current method

i.   query all tweets by news agencies

    i.   choose news agencies that are established, have a large number of followers, post frequently, and use easily identifiable opinion tags.

ii. given these tweets, identify whether they originate from an opinion tweet or a non-opinion tweets and…

iii. …identify whether they are replies, retweets, or quotes of the original tweet

This data collection methods does not guarantee we get all the tweets or the full story, but it gives us an idea of *on average* how people engage with the news agency on Twitter. Based on

this dataset, we then pick samples based on which type of story we want to focus on, and which type of engagement (retweet or quote or reply) we want to look at.

statistical analysis

general hypothesis: opinion stories are read with more care and effort

hypothesis 1: opinion stories have longer replies

hypothesis 2: opinion stories generate longer reply threads

hypothesis 3: opinion stories generate more discourse (replies and quotes) than circulation (retweets)

hypothesis 4: responses to opinion stories have stronger language

hypothesis 5: opinion stories are rarely retweeted by journalists

(different types of agents, agent networks)

limitation of classification algorithms

sentiment analysis and identity classification algorithms does not yield enough accuracy to make claims, so we compensate this by looking at specific cases.

(examples of algorithms)

Online ethnography

Case studies (using two or three news agencies)
Different types of opinion stories
- life
- politics
- incendiary subject lines (kind of like clickbaits)
- language looks like the author is trying to tell the readers what to think

Different types of engagement patterns (examples for opinion pieces and non-opinion pieces, across multiple agencies, in threads)
- "大口号" /flag-waving (similar to propaganda methods, lots of hashtags and no other words)
- address tweet
- address article
- address author
- address the event or buzzwords (shock factor)
- address the writing of this tweet/article ("this is not opinion, this is an established fact!!")

Origin story
What's the purpose of opinion news (in the history of traditional media)?
What's the purpose of categorizing news?

In this day and age, do opinion news perpetuate sentiments and ideas within siloed communities?

What's the thinking behind the accounts (interview social media moderators of news agencies and their special opinion accounts)

- what style of engagement?
- how to choose articles?
- when choose (not) to moderate?
- design of the "opinion tag" simply for practical reasons/categorization?
- how do people generally colalborate with opinion accounts
- what are opinion stories usually about?

Findings

- The "opinion tag" makes a subtle differences. There are much more potent factors that influence the spread of a story.
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Recommendations

Remainning Questions