

McKenzie Skrastins

Dr. Ford

DIDA-280A Instagram Analysis

Due: April 7, 2024

In 2020, during the height of political tension, I discovered a political commentator named Ben Shapiro. There were many socialites with whom I shared opposing views, but I had nothing personal against them. Unlike these commenters, I found Shapiro's approach to sharing his opinions to be so hostile and so condescending, that he had easily become my last favorite "political celebrity". When I was told we had to do an Instagram analysis on a person that was heavily involved in politics, but that had never been elected for an office, I immediately knew I was going to do mine on Ben Shapiro.

An interactive graph was generated using Communalytics and Atlas Nomic. See the link below;

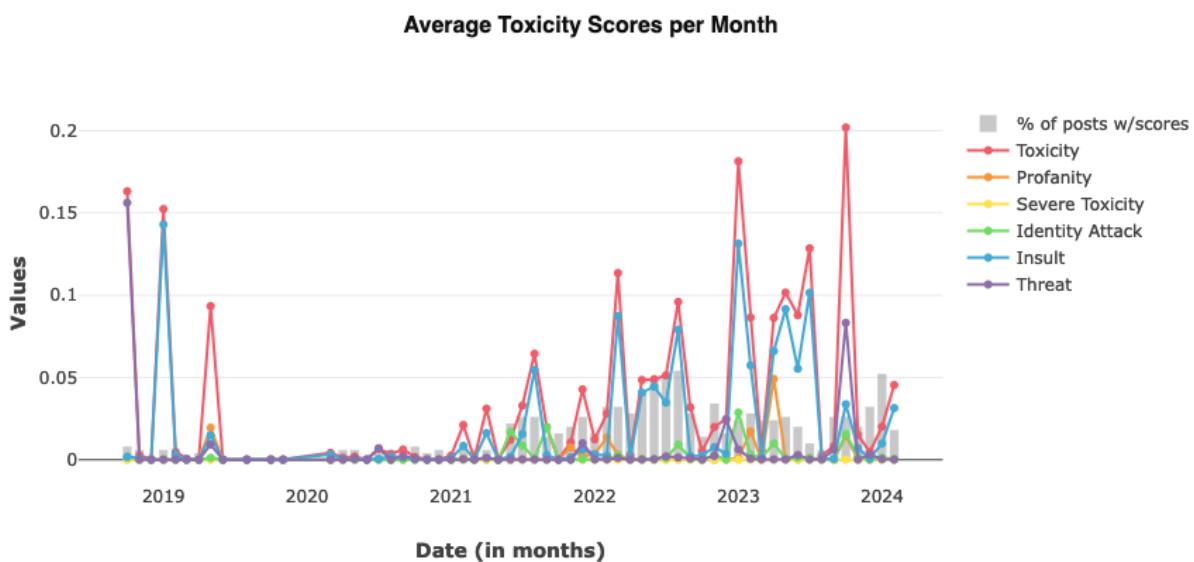
<https://atlas.nomic.ai/data/mlskrastins/embeddings-by-communalyticorg-2/map/0d622b55-ec64-4341-a00a-1bcab4207128>

The graph showed that Shapiro's top categories to post about are, "*Diversity in Education*", "*Politics*", "*Live Wire*", "*Gaza Conflict*", "*Mermaid*", "*Philosophy*", "*Abortion*", "*Festival*", and several "*Miscellaneous*" topics. Although most of these topics did not surprise me, three of these categories caught my eye. First, I was curious about what the Miscellaneous categories included. Upon investigation, "*Miscellaneous(9)*" was found to relate to Shapiro's show on the Daily Wire, "*The Search*". Although "*Miscellaneous(12)*" only had one data point, the post related to COVID vaccines, so many people probably interacted with the post. The category, "*Mermaid*" also caught my attention; these posts seemed to relate to the live-action version of Disney's, "*The*

Little Mermaid". The last category that caught my attention was "*Festival*"; these posts seemed to be related to holidays and the end of the year.

Shapiro is known for his radically right leaning content, as well as his complete disregard for common decency when presenting his opinions. This was reflected in the toxicity report conducted on the web scrape made. See figure 1;

Figure 1: Ben Shapiro Toxicity Report, Taken Over Months



Toxicity reports were conducted on several users on social media, prior to this study, and often Communalytics misreads posts and labels harmless posts as toxic. What was found to be most surprising was that every one of Shapiro's posts that were labeled as toxic could, in fact, be viewed as toxic. Shapiro's highest scoring post was given a 0.99547, in the category "*Toxicity*".

The comment reads,

“Raise your hand if you think she’s pathetic.”

Research showed that this comment was made in response to Vice President Kamala Harris's enthusiasm about electric school buses

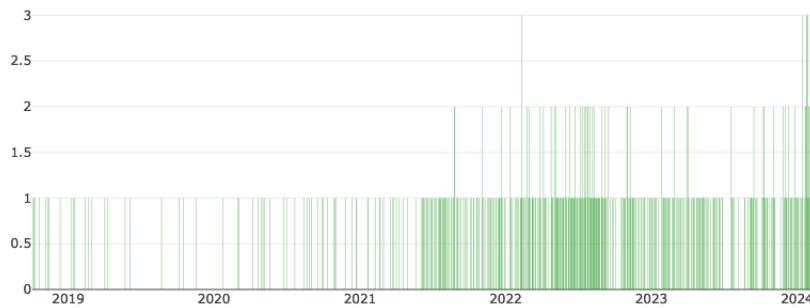
(https://www.instagram.com/p/CnknTmRPV0m/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=embed_video_watch_again) Another comment reads;

“Joy Behar is making her case to be the dumbest person on The View.”

A note was made about how each of these comments targeted a specific person. Many people use social media as a platform to anonymously attack others, but this analysis showed that Ben Shapiro used social media as a platform to attack people, while still being fully identifiable.

Another observation I made was the increase in the amount of posts Shapiro made. See figure 2;

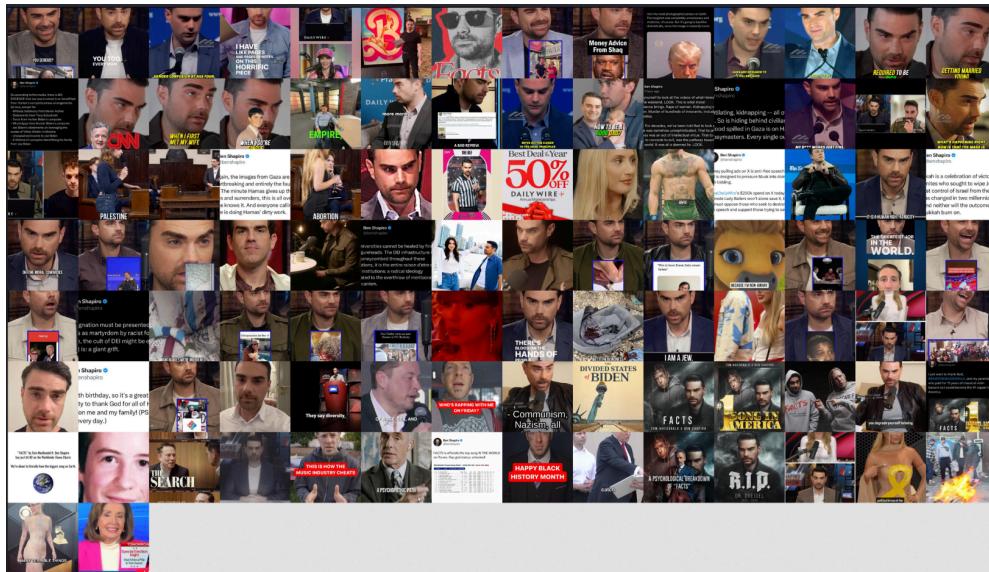
Figure 2: Posts Per Day (Over 5 Days)



Not only did the amount of posts Shapiro made increase, but also the amount per day. It was expected that his post count would be greatest during 2020, since this was when the latest Presidential election was. Contrarily, Shapiro had posted more in the last 1.5 years than he had before. This could be due to the limited number of posts that were collected; the 500 most recent instagram uploads were included in the study, which could result in an incorrect graphic representation.

Another graph that was created was a collage of several of Shapiro's posts. This allowed for the visual analysis of his Instagram content. See figure 3;

Figure 3: Image Wall of Posts



From this image, conclusions about Shapiro's posts were drawn. First, a lot of Shapiro's posts, besides being about politics, seemed to be about pop culture. This is reflected in his posts about Taylor Swift and the Barbie movie. Second, it was noted that Shapiro liked to involve humor in his content, as can be seen by his Donald Trump mugshot post and his, "*The Divided States of Biden*," post. Third, many of the posts made by Shapiro involved his own face, though this is not surprising as the account the posts were being made from was owned by him. These Instagram post covers could be seen as an excellent marketing strategy; both those who like and dislike Shapiro would immediately stop to watch the video upon seeing him, as they instantly know what the video is about. Those who have no interest in Shapiro would stop and watch a video if a prominent pop culture figure was on the cover, or if a funny meme popped up. Shapiro's covers drew in both those who would typically be interested in his content, as well as those who would not, which was perfect for platforms such as Instagram's explore page.

Figure 4 shows Shapiro's most used hashtags;

Figure 4: Ben Shapiro's Most Used Hashtags

Hashtag	Use Count
#tommacdonald	7
#hangovergang	6
#ad	5
#news	2
#megynkellyshow	2
#1	2
#benshapirosbookclub	2
#sundayspecial	2
#politics	1
#habgovergang	1

Shapiro's most used hashtag was “#tommacdonald”, who is a Canadian rapper and singer.

Shapiro's affiliation with MacDonald was not evident, but one post about the rapper could be found on Shapiro's Image Wall. Upon further investigation, it was found that MacDonald and Shapiro have a song together. The second most used hashtag by Shapiro was “#hangovergang”. Again, Shapiro's frequent use of this hashtag was not obvious. “HangOver Gang” seemed to be a word affiliated with MacDonald. What was found to be most surprising was Shapiro's lack of use of hashtags. This allowed for the conclusion that Shapiro was not worried about reaching his target audience to be made.

Another note that was made was the abnormalness of Shapiro's comment section. Many recent posts said;

“I stand with Candace”

in reference to Shapiro's role in removing Candace Owens from The Daily Wire. Other posts said,

“Christ is King”

in reference to Jesus Christ. One would expect that the majority of those viewing and commenting on Shapiro’s posts would be those who agree with his views, but the analysis shows the contrary. There’s no discussion in the comments section, but rather jabs made towards right-wing views, made by someone who identified with the left-wing views, usually about whatever Shapiro was discussing in the video. Clearly, whatever Shapiro says in his videos, or however he says them, attracts those with views opposing his own.

I believe that Instagram is a poor political platform, as I mentioned in my analysis of Tuesday’s paper. I also believe that any social media platform, alone, is a poor political platform. Each media’s algorithm is different, and so I believe that for anyone to get an objective view of politics in the world, they need to continuously view multiple platforms at once. What I enjoyed most about this analysis was having my own personal resentments towards Ben Shapiro be validated. The Toxicity analysis showed that Shapiro was objectively aggressive and overly harsh with his approach to discussions and treatment of others on the internet. I am a firm believer of everyone being able to speak their mind, but I also believe that there is an objectively correct way to go about that. Insults and inappropriate language do not deserve a place when discussing politics, and unfortunately, Shapiro’s brand was built upon his “humorous” approach to speaking out.