Doomsayers or Pollyannas?

News Sentiment and Public Gatekeeping on Twitter

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**Abstract**

Though politicians tend to blame journalists and news organizations for the negative tone of the news, many scholars argue that news consumers play a critical role in determining the news. Studies of news consumption reveal that the most followed stories are those involving conflict, scandal, and controversy. A considerable body of psychological research supports these findings, suggesting that people are hard-wired to attend more closely to negative news and information and that negative information features more centrally in individual decision making. With the emergence of the Web and social media platforms the public’s role in shaping the news flow is more significant than ever before. By reposting, forwarding, sharing, and retweeting citizens have the ability to alter news flows based on their own interests. A critical question thus becomes whether or not the public displays a negativity bias in its sharing of news through social media. Alternatively, social psychology also provides evidence that the public may exhibit a positivity bias when it comes to sharing news with friends and colleagues. To investigate how news sentiment affects public sharing of the news on Twitter we conduct a series of content analyses of published news, tweeted news, and retweeted news from eight mainstream news organizations. Contrary to much previous research, we find that the public does not display either an obvious negativity or positivity bias in its retweeting of news.