

We started off the second portion of this thesis by collecting a large dataset of stories and how they're shared on twitter, over the course of 2016 about the elections. The broad motivation was to see how these political stories were being shared on social media, in particular, which ones tended to go more viral. In the first part of my thesis, I was examining people's views of trust in media; however, trust was a passive reaction whereas tweeting/sharing requires another level of activation on the reader's part that also creates a political impact.

[It was motivated by this study (Berger, Jonah, and Katherine L. Milkman. "What makes online content viral?." *Journal of marketing research* 49.2 (2012): 192-205.) which showed that content that caused emotional "arousal" was more likely to be viral.]

From the media trust study, I confirmed prior theories that readers tend to show low trust towards media (regardless of content itself) when it's from an opposing news outlet to their political beliefs. Stories about candidates rivaling the one the reader reported that they were voting for also received low votes of trust (VERIFY). Furthermore, in a phenomenon specific to this election, any stories about Donald Trump registered very low trust scores.

From the initial exploration of the Twitter data, I saw an interesting pattern emerge. It seems that virality on Twitter (proxied by just the volume of tweets / shares for now) seems to be negatively correlated with trust— i.e. people might be sharing content they *dislike* (related to hate-linking see Hargattai et. al 2008) or about candidates they dislike.

We look at users that follow one candidate only as a proxy for whom they might be interested in voting for. I'm going to verify the nature of this single-candidate follower accounts by a qualitative analysis of a subset.

Looking at the top 100 most viral stories for each "camp" (i.e. clinton-only, trump-only, sanders-only etc.)

we find something interesting— those twitter users aren't tweeting the most about their candidate, but it seems like their rivals. (Clinton only followers tweet about Trump most, then Sanders; Trump followers tweet about Trump most (but overall Trump has the largest following— normalize), then Cruz and Clinton; only Sanders followers tweet most about Sanders, but the Clinton).

TL;DR:

Hypothesis: Twitter users actively participate in hate-linking of *their rival candidate* over sharing of positive stories of their own candidate. i.e. social media is a place for *negative arousal* (Milkman) which might oppose existing studies of news media and trust (hostile media phenomena etc.) in that we're *perpetuating stories and messages we don't like* —> Trump phenomena.

Next steps:

1. Spot check a subset of single-follower accounts to make sure we aren't picking at a different phenomenon than we thought. Do they look to be politically active and voting for that candidate they follow?

2. Hand code a portion of the news stories in our db for [pos/neg/neutral] towards [x where x is featured candidate the story is about].
3. Check ratios. Are stories in our DB 80% neutral but the sharing on Twitter skews 80% negative? If so, that's interesting.