

An analysis of replies to Trump's tweets

Zijian An, Kenneth Joseph
Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

Keywords: Social Media, Replies, Political Voice, Politics and Twitter, Filter Bubbles

Introduction

When you open a tweet, you don't only see the content of the tweet. You also see a number of **replies**.

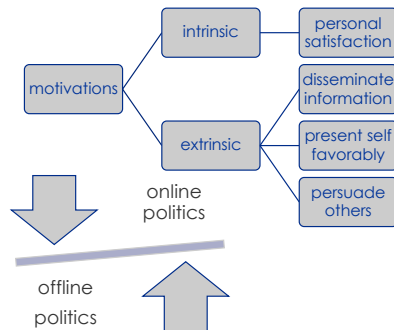


We study the content of these replies for Trump (and Biden) and investigate the individuals who reply to them.

Who chooses to express their political voice via their replies to Trump's tweets?

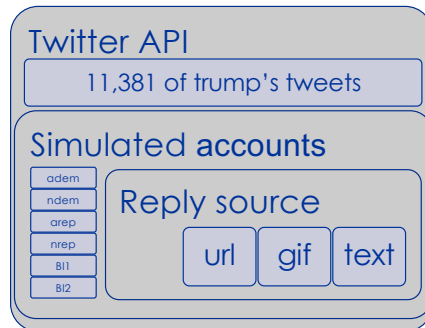
Are the voices of average Americans actually heard?

When different people click on one of President Trump's tweets, do they see the same thing?



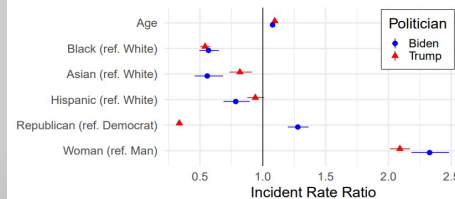
Data & Method

The present work studies replies to **11,381** of Trump's tweets from January 1st, 2018 through July 30th, 2020 (2,597 tweets from Biden for comparison). **Replies to Trump** were extracted from a panel of approximately **1.5M Twitter users** who have sent at least 10 tweets and were active as of August of 2019. Also we **simulated** what these individuals might **see when they click on a Trump tweet**.



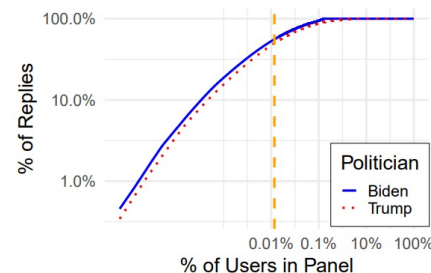
Results

As shown below, individuals who reply to Trump's tweets more frequently are more likely to be female, white, older, and registered as Democrats, in contrast Biden's tweets are republicans.

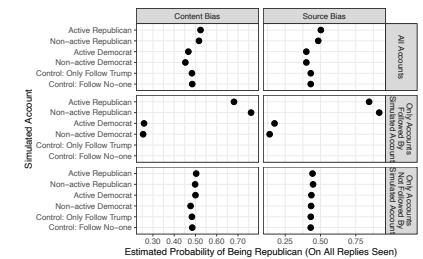


The second figure below shows a CCDF of replies to Trump and Biden. It shows that the vast majority of replies were concentrated within a few individuals.

Only 6.6% of the users in our dataset ever replied to Trump (1.3% to Biden) and of those, a mere 1,794 (1,320 for Biden) accounted for over half of all replies.



In the most extreme case of content and source bias, the practically significant difference in source and content bias across the political spectrum can be almost exclusively attributed to the appearance of replies from accounts followed by the viewing user.



Conclusions and future work

Only 6.6% individuals in our dataset ever replied to one of Trump's tweets, and 80% of all replies come from 0.7% of users

While the most active users in our dataset reply to both popular and unpopular tweets, the vast majority of users reply only to his most popular tweets.

Simulated accounts with similar (simulated) partisan leanings are more likely to see the same replies, but probably not caused by algorithms.