

Don't Republicans Tweet Too?

Using Twitter to Assess the Consequences
of Political Endorsements by Celebrities

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Celebrities and Politics

- Celebrities operate on the public stage and are known to large parts of the population (Marshall 2014)
- They maintain their status only insofar as audiences pay attention to them (Turner 2014). They are mainly involved in commercial and promotional activities: “human entertainment” (Gabler 2011)
- Twitter is a relevant public platform for celebrities’ self-promotion, reaching fans and journalists
- There is an implicit deal between celebrities and users on social media

Questions

- How are celebrities using their communication power on social media to address political issues?
- Why risk talking about political topics and potentially alienate parts of the fan base (who either do not care about politics or support a different party)?
- When they decide to engage with politics, do celebrities act as **cheerleaders** (i.e., posting about the candidates they support) or as **critics** (i.e., posting about the politicians they oppose)?

Hypotheses

- Engagement with celebrities' political tweets will be lower relative to typical (non-political) tweets (H1)
- Celebrities endorsing major party candidates on social media will be more likely to act as critics than as cheerleaders (H2)
- Celebrities' social media posts that criticize opponents will elicit a higher volume of retweets than social media posts that endorse their favored candidates (H3)

Data

- 222,801 tweets from 83 celebrities
 - Lena Dunham, Oprah Winfrey, Katy Perry, LeBron James, and 60 other well-known and widely followed individuals from the entertainment industry
 - Remaining celebrities endorsed Trump or Sanders
- Number of Tweets containing character strings: “Trump” or “Hillary” or “Clinton” or “Sanders”: 4,403
- Analysis time window: January 2016 to May 2018

Conclusion

- Political tweets are common (sometimes without explicit mentions of candidates)
- But direct mentions of politicians are surprisingly frequent as well
- Engagement with celebrities' political tweets **is not** lower relative to typical (non-political) tweets
- Celebrities do not shy away from cheerleading