Twitting #PoliticalCrises:

Social Media, Big Data, and the Politics of Conflict

GVPT459H  
T-Th 2:00-3:15  
Fall 2018  
TYD 1102

Professor: @Ernesto Calvo  
Office Hours: Wed 12:15-1:15PM  
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First, it was the Arab Spring. Soon after, #BlackLivesMatter, #Ferguson, #Ayotzinapa, #Nisman, #Dilma, #Brexit. In the last five years, political conflict has migrated from the streets and into the blogosphere. As social media grows in importance, so does the time and resources that are invested by political parties, political entrepreneurs, social organizations, and lobbyist. The management of politics, and conflict, requires today the dissemination of political narratives among a growing virtual constituency that acquires information through social networks rather than through printed media or in their local communities.

As the importance of social media grows, so do the technical demands that are required to capture data, process information, and reach sensible political conclusions. This seminar, at the intersection of politics, computer science, and social network analysis, seeks to provide students with the technical skills to work with social media data as well as the knowledge to interpret relevant information.

The proposed GVPT seminar, will teach students how to download tweets, create workable datasets, plot social networks, detect communities of users, and identify relevant political discourses. The goal is to ensure that students will be able to both run their own big data analyses, understand the political messages that are being produced by different communities of users, as well as the larger context in which conflict and politics are communicated in society.
This University of Maryland GVPT Honor’s Seminar will challenge students to master the intellectual tools needed to wrestle with social media data, explore the social and political consequences of this new media, and address Big Questions related to the ethical and political of information acquisition in the twenty first Century.

Course objectives:

@Students will acquire the skills to:

1. Download and Process Social Media Data;
2. Create social network objects, generate layouts to map their data, plot social networks that describe communities of users;
3. Detect communities through different algorithms, identify political groups in social conflict settings, and assess the social structure of and the relative proximity between different communities;
4. Explore and map the content of tweets, use regular expressions to mine social network data for different types of narratives;
5. Produce reports and present their results to peers;

@Students will demonstrate:

6. An understanding of how social media data “cures” information that is disseminated among communities of users;
7. An understanding of how the “echo chamber” feeds narratives in times of conflict as well as its connection to the existing literature;
8. An understanding of “information effects” theories, which explain how different groups of individuals acquire and process information;

Organization of the Seminar

1. @Students will form work teams to solve practical problems in the collection of social networks’ data. They will use this data to describe political events on real time. Finally, they will produce an individual report and a group report on political events and describe how the tools they develop improve on our understanding of #politicalcrises. Assignments will include:
a. Connecting to the Twitter API and collecting data.
b. Formatting social media data to facilitate big data analyses.
c. Creating network representations (igraph) of their data.
d. Detecting communities of users and describing their positions in the network.
e. Analyzing Tweets and reporting on their dissemination among communities of users.
f. Producing technical and political reports using social media data.

@Students are expected do the assigned readings and participate in class discussion. Grades will be based on participation, small weekly assignments, and two reports with social networks and their interpretations. Please familiarize yourself with the academic honesty policy of the University of Maryland.

2. The Class

Every week we will have two different activities: First, we will have a Seminar day where @Students will discuss key problems in the study of social conflict through social media. On this day, students will understand theories that describe the generation and dissemination of political information. Second, we will have a lab day, where @Students will learn how to collect and process social media data. Each Lab is designed to ensure that students learn how to acquire and process data as well as the interpretation of social media output.

3. Grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation and Tweet of the day</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments (Total)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Graph</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report (Individual)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report (Group)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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4. Learning Outcomes:

• @Students will master basic concepts, theories and methods pertaining to the comparative study of public opinion and information theory.

• @Students will write an original report on a political crisis as see through social media networks.
• @Students will be able to understand how the study of social media networks relates to existing theories of public opinion.

ALL READINGS ARE AVAILABLE IN:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/38x2cj4rwouv092/AAArq9fg8RffvG2Rnkp2zZUpa?dl=0

SCHEDULE

Week 1, August 28: Introduction: Social Networks, Political Crises, and the Study of Public Opinion

Readings

  Lab: An introduction to R.
  https://www.dropbox.com/sh/afi3ib2jbra2lva/AAApm-E0noiNS1rtoBNjutCYa?dl=0

Week 2, September 4 and 6: Memory processing and Attitudes

To Read in class discussion piece:


Required reading:


Supplemental (optional) reading:


1st Lab: Understanding JSON files.
Week 3, September 11 and 13: Motivated Reasoning and the Echo Chamber

Required reading:

Supplemental (optional) reading:

2nd Lab: Creating a network object and understanding its properties.

Week 4, September 18 and 20: Political Knowledge and the Presidency

Required reading:

3nd Lab: Managing your Network object.

Week 5, September 25 and 27: Polarization and Social Networks

Required reading:

**Supplemental (optional) reading:**

4	extsuperscript{rd} Lab: Communities and Layouts

**Week 6, October 2 and 4: Echo Chambers in Twitter**


5	extsuperscript{th} Lab: Painting edges and descriptive data on your networks.

**Week 7, October 9 and 11: My Community is Your Community**


6	extsuperscript{th} Lab: Authorities and Embedded links.

**Week 8, October 16 and 18: Review and Presentation of First set of Graphs**

- Presentation of Graph Results

**Week 9, October 23 and 25: Spring Break: Sentiment analysis**

- Banks, Calvo, Karol, and Telhami. #PolarizedFeeds: Two experiments on polarization and social media
7th Lab: Sentiment Analyses.

**Week 10, October 30, November 1: Polarization in Social Media**


8th Lab: Friends of Friends.

**Week 11, November 6 and 8: Movie Time**

- "Nosedive"

**Week 12, November 13 and 15: #Brexit!**


9th Lab: Sentiment over time.

**Week 13, November 20: Congress**


**Week 14, November 27 and 29: Going Small!**

9th Lab: Support lab for final projects.

Week 15, December 4-6: Presentations of Preliminary Findings (group reports)

EXAMS WEEK: Turn in Final Reports