Social Media in the 2015 General Election

Was it the # election?
Effect of candidate tweeting on share of votes?
Effect of Twitter on mobilising voters?
Media in Context: Social Media Data

Candidate tweeting

Tweets by opinion leaders
Twitter data collection

Data collected:
• Candidate tweets: user timelines for all the candidates running in the 2015 GE elections who had a twitter account (2400 out of 3629).
• Opinion leaders: 35 key individuals (David Cameron to Russel Brand).
• Search terms: 70 different search terms ("tuition fees", "terrorism").
• Search “election” by geography: 14 major cities in the UK

Sample period: 1 February 2015 - 28 May 2015
Focus period: short campaign, 30 March - 7 May
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Twitter data collection

- Collected full timelines (subject to the Twitter API limits - 3k tweets) for all candidates, regardless of party. Some go back to 2008.
  ~3.4 million tweets

- Focus on:
  - candidates from the first 7 parties
  - the short campaign, 30 March - 7 May
Who is tweeting?

Twitter accounts by party

Number of candidates

Con  Lab  LD  SNP  PC  UKIP  Green

No Twitter account  Twitter account
Who is tweeting?

[Graph showing average number of tweets per candidate by region]
Who is tweeting?

• On average, candidates from more competitive constituencies tweet more than those from safe constituencies.
Who is tweeting?

On average, national party candidates tweet more if they are in competitive constituencies than if they are in safe constituencies.

However, candidates of regional parties tweet more if they are in safe constituencies.
How much are candidates tweeting?

Candidate tweets in the short campaign

Number of tweets

Date

2 Apr 9 Apr 16 Apr 23 Apr 30 Apr 7 May
How much are candidates tweeting?

![Graph showing tweets per tweeting candidate for different parties]

- Conservative
- Labour
- LibDems
- SNP
- Plaid Cymru
- UKIP
- Greens
Turning tweets text into numbers

• Processing tweets text
  • cleaning
  • natural language processing
• Methods for analyzing text
  • Keywords and dictionaries
  • Supervised classification
  • Topic modeling
What are candidates tweeting?

Positive tone in candidate tweets

Negative tone in candidate tweets

Percentage positive words

Con Lab LD SNP PC UKIP Green

Percentage negative words

Con Lab LD SNP PC UKIP Green
What are candidates tweeting about?

• Are candidates tweeting about different things?
• Extract most frequent words in candidate tweets
  – The most frequent words in a tweet are actually user mentions, followed by hashtags
  – Removed user mentions, but kept hashtags

• Conservatives: hanging, originality, justgiving, vatable, appropriation, foul, runyorkshire, stereotypical, scrapes, elections, feasibility, walesdebate
• Labour: nunnery, askew, spiders, trawling, leedsnewsdays, bringing, unsworth, eyemouth, ambushing, loveormskirk, bbqs, imploding
How do candidates tweet?

- On average, 28% of candidate tweets include links and 28% include photos.
- There are significant differences between candidates of different parties.
Does it make a difference?

- Regression model explaining candidate vote shares as a function of Twitter activity, party, change in the vote share of the candidate’s party in the constituency vs. 2010, gender and region.
- Sharing urls is associated with a reduction in vote shares, while sharing photos is associated with an increase.
- Both the number of followers AND the number of people followed are associated with increases in vote shares.
Impact of Twitter Activity on Reported Contact[1]

- Proportion of respondents who report being contacted by a party during the campaign.

Effect of contact on reported vote amongst Twitter users.
Note: Many people use Twitter but few use for political information.
Impact of Twitter Activity on Reported Contact[2]

- Linked candidate twitter activity to reports of contact by social media.
- Amongst twitter users, increased tweeting increases probability of reporting contact by social media by more so in safe constituencies.
Impact of Twitter Activity on Reported Contact[3]

- Safe Constituencies
- Marginal Constituencies

All parties

Labour

- Total Tweets
- Labour Tweets per Constituency
Conclusions

• Candidates took social media (i.e. Twitter) seriously.
• It’s not how often candidates tweet but what they said – photos and following people back where most effective.
• Social media could provide an inexpensive way to mobilise voters in safe constituency when party mobilisation efforts are targeted in marginals.