



## 5th Bi-Annual SMaPP Global Conference

November 3-4, 2017

The Politics Department, 19 W 4th Street, Room 217

### Friday, November 3

- 8:30 - 9:00 Breakfast
- 9:00 - 9:15 Welcome
- 9:15 – 10:00 Anjie Fang, Philip Habel, Craig MacDonald, and Iadh Ounis (University of Glasgow): *Votes on Twitter: Understanding Citizens' Candidate Preferences and the Topics of Conversation During the 2016 Presidential Election*
- 10:00 – 10:45 Shawndra Hill (UPenn), Masha Krupenkin (Stanford), and David Rothschild (Microsoft Research): *Partisanship and Risky Financial Decisions*
- 10:45 – 11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00 – 11:45 Denis Stukal, Sergey Sanovich, Richard Bonneau, and Joshua A. Tucker (NYU): *For Whom the Bot Tolls: Bots in Russian Political Twitter 2014-17*
- 11:45 - 12:30 Sarah Shugars and Nick Beauchamp (Northeastern): *Conversational Dynamics in Online Arguments*
- 12:30 – 1:00 Jonathan Nagler, Greg Eady, Andy Guess, Kevin Munger, Joshua Tucker, Jan Zilinsky (NYU): *Twitter Bubbles: Myth or Reality – Mapping the Ideological Distribution of What/Who People Follow on Twitter*
- 1:00 – 2:00 Lunch and Collaborative Session I
- 2:00 – 2:45 Kayla Jordan and Jamie Pennebaker (University of Texas, Austin): *The Language of Politics and Culture: It's more interesting than we thought*
- 2:45 – 3:30 Cristian Vaccari (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Augusto Valeriani (University of Bologna): *Digital Conversations and Political Participation: Comparing Established and Third Wave Democracies*
- 3:30 - 3:45 Coffee Break
- 3:45 - 4:30 Tobias Rothmund (University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany): *Temporal and Interpersonal Dynamics of the Formation of Political Action Groups in Facebook – The case of the German "Refugee Crisis"*

- 4:30 – 5:15 Andreu Casas (NYU), Pablo Barbera, Patrick Egan, Richard Bonneau, John Jost, Joshua Tucker, *Leaders or Followers? Measuring Political Responsiveness in the U.S. Congress Using Social Media Data*
- 5:15 – 6:00 Happy Hour with NYU Politics Department
- 6:15 Dinner for SMaPP Global Members at Alta Restaurant (64 W 10th St, New York, NY 10011)

## **Saturday, November 4**

- 9:00 – 9:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 – 10:15 Dean Eckles (MIT), with Christos Nicolaides (MIT): *Information-theoretic measures of habit in behavioral data*
- 10:15 – 11:00 Maria Petrova (UPF, Barcelona), with Leonardo Bursztyn (University of Chicago), Georgy Egorov (Northwestern University), and Ruben Enikolopov (UPF, Barcelona and NES, Moscow): *Social Media and Xenophobia*
- 11:00 – 11:15 Coffee Break
- 11:15– 12:00 Molly Roberts (UCSD) and Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld (UCLA): *Measuring Internet Outages Using Twitter*
- 12:00– 12:45 Stefan Wojcik (Pew Research Center) and Solomon Messing (Pew Research Center): *Hyper-partisan Fake News or Business as Usual? How Bots Spread News Media on Twitter*
- 12:45 – 1:30 Lunch
- 1:30 - 2:15 Douglas Guilbeault (UPenn), Nick Monaco (Oxford Internet Institute), and Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon (UPenn): *Bot Influence during the 2017 Constitutional Assembly Election in Venezuela*
- 2:15 - 3:30 Roundtable: *Online incivility and hate speech on social media: How should we define it? How to measure? What are the consequences for the quality of public deliberation? What techniques are effective at reducing it?:* Pablo Barberá (USC), Yannis Theocharis (University of Mannheim), Alex Siegel (NYU), Joshua Tucker (NYU), Kevin Munger (NYU), Cristian Vaccari (Royal Holloway, University of London)
- 3:30 – 4:30 Coffee, Publication Planning Session, and Collaborative Session II

## **Titles and Abstracts**

### **Anjie Fang, Philip Habel, Craig MacDonald, and Iadh Ounis (University of Glasgow)**

*Votes on Twitter: Understanding Citizens' Candidate Preferences and the Topics of Conversation During the 2016 Presidential Election*

Abstract: Social media offers scholars new and innovative ways of understanding public opinion, including citizens' prospective votes in elections and referenda. Political conversations on social media occur in real time and are conveyed by an engaged audience. We turn to Twitter and train a machine learning model to classify users' preferences over the two presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, leading up to the 2016 presidential election. We take advantage of hashtags that signaled users' preferences and prospective vote choices, employing a novel classifier---a Topic Based Naive Bayesian model---that we demonstrate not only improves on existing classifiers, but offers a means to explore the topics of conversation surrounding the two presidential candidates in the 2016 election as well. Our findings demonstrate that we are able to classify users with a high degree of accuracy and precision, but further, they offer insight around the topics of discussion during a pivotal election.

### **Shawndra Hill (UPenn), Masha Krupenk (Stanford), and David Rothschild (Microsoft Research)**

*Partisanship and Risky Financial Decisions*

Abstract: Partisans' self-reported beliefs about the economy vary dramatically depending on the party that holds the presidency. Do these responses represent genuine differences in beliefs about the economy, or do they reflect partisan cheerleading on surveys? To answer this question, we rely on a novel dataset of Bing searches for housing, automobile, and the stock market for over 100,000 partisans from February 2016 – July 2017. We find that in the aftermath of the 2016 election, Democrats, as members of the losing party, were less likely to search for both cars and houses, while Republicans' search behaviors remained unchanged. This statistically significant and meaningful shift in economic behavior by partisans, which correlates with their shift in stated economic expectations, suggests that for some groups their shift in stated economic expectations represents a genuine difference in beliefs about the economy.

### **Denis Stukal, Sergey Sanovich, Richard Bonneau, and Joshua A. Tucker (NYU)**

*For Whom the Bot Tolls: Bots in Russian Political Twitter 2014-17*

Abstract: Twitter bots have become an influential tool for political campaigning and public opinion formation. Among others, Russian bots have recently gained major public attention worldwide due to their international activity. We focus on the use of Twitter bots in both Russian domestic and foreign policy in times of Russia's active involvement in the political crisis in Ukraine and the U.S. presidential campaign. We detect bots using a large dataset of Russian tweets from 2014 -- 2017 and show that bots are remarkably prevalent in the Russian political twittersphere. We also test hypotheses regarding the purpose of these bots, including whether bots are used more often during periods of crisis, if they act as "amplifiers" that promote the government's voice, and if they engage in "trolling"-like behavior against regime opposition.

### **Sarah Shugars and Nick Beauchamp (Northeastern)**

*Conversational Dynamics in Online Arguments*

Abstract: While many studies have shown that brief social media interactions have little effect on subsequent online behavior, a number of more recent experiments have shown modest but real effects of single-shot interactions. Deliberative theory would suggest that repeated interpersonal interactions

may have more substantial effects than single-shot interventions of the kind generally explored in the persuasion literature. But to understand these repeated interactions — back-and-forth arguments — requires first a model of why they exist in the first place: Why do people bother arguing online? What brings them back to a repeated argument? What factors contribute to an individual returning to an argument in their efforts to get the final word in, or eventually abandoning that argument in disgust or boredom? We develop a Bayesian model of repeated Twitter interactions — political arguments — to explain what motivates subjects to persist in an argument and explain the dynamics of their interactions. These arguments prove to be structurally richer and potentially of greater effect than most scholars of social media currently assume.

**Jonathan Nagler, Greg Eady, Andy Guess, Kevin Munger, Joshua Tucker, and Jan Zilinsky (NYU)**

*Twitter Bubbles: Myth or Reality – Mapping the Ideological Distribution of What/Who People Follow on Twitter*

Abstract: Combining self-reported ideology with observed data on what accounts respondents follow on Twitter we map the ideological distribution of accounts followed by respondents. We try to characterize the distribution, and describe in understandable terms what proportion of people in different ideological positions follow non-trivial proportions of accounts that represent ideological view-points different than their own, and see non-trivial proportions of tweets that represent ideological view-points different than their own. We split observed tweets into 3 types of sources: media, political, and ‘other’ friends.

**Kayla Jordan and Jamie Pennebaker (University of Texas, Austin)**

*The Language of Politics and Culture: It's more interesting than we thought*

Abstract: Text analyses of the 2016 debates revealed that Trump was exceptionally low in analytic thinking and quite high in confidence and clout. Later analyses of US presidential papers, SOTUs, and inaugural addresses over the last 250 years highlighted that compared to all other American presidents, Trump is the lowest in analytic thinking and highest in clout. Not surprising. What IS surprising is that for the last 100 years, there has been a steady linear drop in presidents' analytic thinking and linear increase in clout. Trump, it turns out, is not a deviate compared to any linear predictive model. Similar analyses of prime ministers of the UK, Canada, and Australia show similar (if slightly smaller) language changes. Comparable linguistic shifts are not as apparent in the language of legislatures like Congress or Parliament or of cultural institutions like movie scripts or books. We discuss the findings in light of the expanding role of the media and changes in the voting population.

**Cristian Vaccari (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Augusto Valeriani (University of Bologna)**

*Digital Conversations and Political Participation: Comparing Established and Third Wave Democracies*

Abstract: We investigate whether and how informal political talk on digital media contributes to citizens' repertoires of political participation based on unique surveys of samples representative of internet users in seven Western democracies. We show that political talk on both social networking sites and mobile instant messaging platforms is positively associated with institutional and extra-institutional participation in all seven countries. However, the relationship between talk on social media and both types of participation is significantly stronger in established democracies (Denmark, France, United Kingdom, and United States) than in “third wave” democracies (Greece, Poland, and Spain). By contrast, the strength of the relationship between political talk on mobile instant messaging platforms and participation is not significantly different when comparing more and less established democracies. These findings suggest that informal political talk on digital platforms can contribute to citizens' participatory repertoires, and that different institutional settings, in combination with different technological affordances, play an important role in shaping these patterns.

**Tobias Rothmund (University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany)**

*Temporal and Interpersonal Dynamics of the Formation of Political Action Groups in Facebook – The case of the German “Refugee Crisis”*

Abstract: The present paper investigates political communication in Facebook (FB) groups during the so-called refugee crisis in Germany. We gathered data from twelve public FB groups (N = 51.177 participants). Six of these groups were concerned with supporting (e.g. Refugees.Welcome.Regensburg), and six of the groups were concerned with criticizing (e.g., Resign Merkel & co.) the German government for the accommodation of refugees in 2015. News feeds of the groups were analyzed between March 2015 and February 2017. The goals of this research is to showcase how data from public FB groups can be used to investigate the formation of political action groups.

**Andreu Casas, Pablo Barbera, Patrick Egan, Richard Bonneau, John Jost, and Joshua Tucker (NYU)**

*Leaders or Followers? Measuring Political Responsiveness in the U.S. Congress Using Social Media Data*

Abstract: Are legislators responsive to the issue demands of the public? If so, are they more likely to “listen” to some citizens than others? Research on agenda setting and responsiveness finds a correspondence between the issue priorities of the public and politicians but it does not provide conclusive evidence on who influences whom. We argue that determining the direction of the effect is of great relevance to adjudicate between particular representation models and to judge political responsiveness generally. We fill this current gap by studying all tweets sent by Members of the U.S. Congress, Democratic and Republican supporters, attentive citizens, and a random sample of the American electorate from January 2013 to December 2014. Using a Latent Dirichlet Allocation model, we extract topics that represent the diversity of issues that legislators and ordinary citizens discuss. Then, we exploit variation in the distribution of topics over time to test whether Members of Congress lead or follow their constituents in their selection of issues to discuss. We find that legislators are more likely to respond than influence public issue demands, results that hold even after controlling for media effects. We also find that they are more likely to “listen” to their own supporters and attentive voters than to the general public.

**Dean Eckles (MIT), with Christos Nicolaides (MIT)**

*Information-theoretic Measures of Habit in Behavioral Data*

Abstract: People tend to perform behaviors repeatedly in the same settings. Some such learned behaviors are labeled *habits* because they are characterized by activation by recurring context cues, insensitivity to short-term changes in goals, and other markers of automaticity (e.g., speed of performance, rigidity). We develop and evaluate information-theoretic measures of regularity and predictability of behaviors, which can be used as measures of habits in large observational datasets. So far our attention has mainly been on exercise, but I would be interested in applying this to news consumption. We might even have results with news consumption by this time.

**Maria Petrova (UPF, Barcelona), with Leonardo Bursztyn (University of Chicago), Georgy Egorov (Northwestern University), and Ruben Enikolopov (UPF, Barcelona and NES, Moscow)**

*Social Media and Xenophobia*

Abstract: Does social media promote xenophobia? We study how social media in Russia affected hate crime and hate attitudes toward migrants. We find that stronger social media penetration promoted hate crime, but only for places with high underlying predispositions to nationalism. We also find some evidence that social media penetration makes people more likely to report xenophobic attitudes. We are planning to conduct an experiment to be able to isolate the mechanisms for the effects that we study. More specifically, we would like to offer people money if they agree on a matched donation to organizations

that support migrants, in private and in public. We then can compute the difference between donation decision in public and in private. Also, we are going to do list experiment. We would like to use both as measures of stigma at the city level, to see if social media decrease stigma associated with expressing xenophobic attitudes.

**Molly Roberts (UCSD) and Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld (UCLA)**

*Measuring Internet Outages Using Twitter*

Abstract: Governments frequently use Internet outages during political crises to control the flow of information. However, the exact location and duration of these outages is difficult to determine precisely, and cross-national data on outages often comes from individuals' accounts or news reports, which can be unreliable. In this paper, we explore using geo-located Twitter data for measuring Internet outages. Using case studies of reported outages in Gabon, Cameroon, and Kashmir, we show that geo-located Twitter data can recover real outages and identify misreported ones. In comparison to other Internet measurements, geo-located Twitter data have some important advantages, such as identifying sub-national outages and generating rationales for the outage, and this type of data could be used productively in conjunction with traditional Internet measurements to study the causes and consequences of outages cross-nationally.

**Stefan Wojcik (Pew Research Center) and Solomon Messing (Pew Research Center)**

*Hyper-partisan Fake News or Business as Usual? How Bots Spread News Media on Twitter*

Abstract: Recent years have seen a boom in specially programmed social media agents, commonly called 'bots,' and a simultaneous increase in research on bot detection. Yet there is a dearth of work that can claim to quantify the scope and role of bot traffic in the current media landscape. We analyze a random sample of Tweets from 2017 and show that bot accounts are responsible for a large majority of tweets containing links to nearly 1,000 popular news media sites with a focus on current events. We find no differences in bot traffic linking to news outlets with primarily liberal- or conservative- audiences—rather, bot traffic was highest for outlets with audiences that span the ideological spectrum, particularly among those with a business-orientation and among news aggregators. Bot traffic was notably lower among sites with contact pages and among fact-checking websites. We also use a method called regularized correspondence analysis to estimate the ideology at the level of the user and the news article, which allows us to test these questions at the level of the article rather than just at the source, enabling us to address concerns about ecological inference.

**Douglas Guilbeault (UPenn), Nick Monaco (Oxford Internet Institute), and Sandra González-Bailón (UPenn)**

*Bot Influence during the 2017 Constitutional Assembly Election in Venezuela*

Abstract: As of July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela officially entered a dictatorship under President Nicolás Maduro, who used presidential decree to call a vote for the creation of a constituent assembly that would give him almost limitless power over the military, economy, and public sector. Given that Maduro used legal exploitation and military coercion to rig election results, there is reason to expect that he used manipulative techniques over social media, through the use of fake and automated Twitter accounts (i.e. bots) to stifle dissidence and disseminate pro-regime propaganda. This study examines whether bots reached network positions of measurable influence in retweet networks of over 5 million unique tweets pertaining to the constituent assembly, collected from July 22<sup>nd</sup> to August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.