

A summary of the day's conversation...

Small group discussion topics:

1. Law: legal and regulatory challenges

“Normative law seeks help from the empiricists.”

Key things we talked about:

- First Amendment / Speech Issues
- Advertising, consumer protections, and reputational issues
- Property Issues

What do we (lawyers) need to know about what is happening with social media? How can decisions about the values we seek to protect be informed by empirical work?

What assumptions about human behavior need challenging?

Freedom to switch platforms

Belief formation

Key research needs:

FDA has requested studies on advertising through “interactive media” re: drugs. How is fair balance re: informational needs on risk/benefits to be achieved?

We also want to know why people don't use social networks. Are some segments of society being left out? Are some segments of society unable to participate because of skill deficiencies?

2. Methods and evaluation

Themes:

We have what we want to measure (e.g., influence) and there are things we can actually measure (e.g., likes, retweets). Not always a one-to-one relationship between the two. Problem with collecting news sources: only available in day-long units. They need an interval that is an hour or less. Found that they could use Twitter to determine when a news article was published. Tori Ekstrand is working on “Hot News” doctrine and is interested in similar research: what is the life cycle of breaking news? Chris Vargo: just a few minutes, based on his work examining the Penn State scandal.

Does AP have metrics behind the value of breaking news? Some. They are starting to

measure clickthroughs.

What data is available?

Metadata on social networks is rich: GPS, time, platform, ID, type of device, sometimes “real name.” IP address is not available. Location info only when user opts-in.

For purposes of confirming authenticity, the data is not entirely reliable. Tools available to spoof location information. Some evidence of their use in Arab spring.

Strategic communication group was interested in how to get a representative data set. This is difficult to get because of limitations imposed by the platform operator such as Facebook.

Zeynup mention Carter Butts’ work questions whether random samples from social networks are in fact random.

Appropriateness of mixed method approaches.

Big data sets and small sample sets can complement each other.

3. Strategic communications: credibility, authenticity, and engagement

Themes:

Role of social media: used to communicate within orgs as well as to outsiders

Audience uses of social media: innovation by users, authenticity, how much are people actually consuming? Why do people use it?

Technical aspects of social media: what are regulatory and privacy issues? Different platforms have different challenges for researchers. Information flow patterns may be different. User expectations are different.

Area that is rich for qualitative research: great deal of overlap with those focused on politics and law. Whole intermediary industry engaged in these activities (and research) that has not been widely studied.

Large proportion of Amazon Turk tasks are spam related: fake reviews, captchas, link spam. Symantic analysis can identify some of this. Trusted networks also being used to combat this.

User’s increasing use of privacy settings has made some of this research more difficult.

Research Questions: Role of social media

Given the various possible functions, how can social media most effectively be used for communication?

What is the role of social media in health promotion (communicate with *organizations* vs. target audience)

What is the right mix of “traditional” and social media for communication campaigns? (more control in traditional media, less control in social media)

How can we take advantage of user-generated content features?

How does one effectively communicate about health on social media (authenticity, expertise, rules of the road)

How is advertising and other strategic communication adapting to the social media world? What new or adapted strategies are being used? (undercover ads)

Audience uses of social media

Who is on what social media? Who sees what messages on Twitter/Facebook? (lots going out but how much is being read and processed?)

Who uses what social media for what purpose?

Individual differences in social media use. What are they and how does this impact strategic communication?

Why do people go on social media? What do they get out of it?

How do we attract the audience? (authentic voice, know your audience)

What components affect what people see and process on social media?

What kinds of communications are audiences receptive to? How does this vary?

Information seeking model – how can we have the right content when folks are looking for it?

How are people using social media for health? How can the social support aspect of social media be best used? (and what are privacy issues here?)

How do people judge whether information on social media is credible (or not)?

Once people “like” something, what is their behavior for companies, etc.?

Technical aspects of social media

How do regulatory and privacy concerns effect use of social media?

How do social media work from a programming perspective?

How do information flow patterns work on different social media?

4. Journalism: the evolving news ecosystem, from economics to network journalism

Talked about the main functions of social media for journalists: newsgathering, dissemination, promotion.

How do you mitigate against the bias that comes from the medium through which you reach out to sources?

Concerns about news cocooning, Sunstein’s “Daily Me.” Are people getting a narrower sense of the world? Not just listening to your own echo chamber, but loss of serendipitous access to information.

Counter view: social curation of news can expose people to a wider array of news sources.

Book on this debate: Markus Prior, Post-Broadcast Democracy. Finds that political knowledge has declined since advent of multiple news sources. Has led to gap between those at top and bottom.

Move from search to “liked” information provided by others. From active to passive.

5. Politics and movements: campaigns, social change, diversity and representation

Initial question: Are we looking at the right things and asking the right questions? Is there a disconnect between what we want to know and the data available to answer our questions?

Relationships that can be explored: Interaction between social media and mainstream media, social media and social movements, social media and social movement organizers.

Talked about OWS as an institution and its use of social media.

Does SM serve different functions with and without electoral politics: is the effectiveness/leverage different in the two worlds? Important not to see social media as separate from other media/processes.

Contrasted impact of OWS and Tea Party w/r/t use of electoral processes to achieve aims.
Raises questions of where, when, and how research should be directed to answer questions of social media's role.

Expected explosion of astroturfing through Amazon Turk during next election cycle. Sock puppetry and other false means of showing social media presence. It will be interesting to see if our means of assessing authenticity keep up (predatory-prey relationship).

-- Also see this in click-fraud in advertising. Some infrastructure already in place to address this.

-- Less benign counter is an increased use of trusted systems and reduced user privacy.

Access to data from social networks (send to Library of Congress?) will become an issue due to platform limitations and ephemerality of the data.

NEXT STEPS

How can we foster this interdisciplinary work?

How do we share questions, data, scholarship? -- Social media!

- Problem is this work is not valued enough in tenure and promotion decisions

Need better information sharing regarding methods, especially platform specific research methods.

- Again, not valued for promotion and tenure
- Some have leveraged the sharing of this kind of information for improved stature
- Might consider a blog focused on this

Need to network outside your discipline to look for opportunities to do submit joint grant requests

Need better sharing of datasets

- UNC's iSchool could help to support an infrastructure for data sharing

In-person gatherings to make collaboration easier

- Center for Media Law and Policy plans to host monthly brown-bag lunch

It's a lot more fun to collaborate across disciplines

