Automated analysis & agenda-setting: Activity and issue ownership on Twitter

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Abstract:

Twitter use varies – some users seldom send messages while others tweet frequently. This study explores frequency of use as an antecedent to agenda setting. Viewpoints of agenda setting and issue ownership were used to better understand a longitudinal analysis of 38 million tweets from the 2012 election. Twitter behaviors and media issue ownership were assessed. Certain media "owned" certain issues on Twitter, aligning with partisan affiliation. Moreover, agenda-setting relationships differ by Twitter use. More frequent users of the service aligned more with partisan media, while less active users aligned more with mainstream media. This study provides evidence that behavior on social media results in differing political effects. Further, evidence of a new construct is offered: media issue ownership. Media issue ownership, as an extension of the foundational theory, posits that partisan media prioritize distinct issues that stem from ideological agendas. In turn, audiences differentiate between partisan media in their ability to cover certain issues.

Keywords: Twitter; agenda setting; big data; issue ownership; media issue ownership; political communication