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How Twitter Users Communicate Trending Topics and Political Topics

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Q: How do twitter users use certain tools to communicate messages about politics or trending topics?

Twitter and Archivist were used in order to compare the ways in which twitter users communicate these messages. Four different topics were selected; two political ones, Barack Obama, and Bin Laden, and two pop culture topics, Lindsay Lohan and Inception. The search went from August 25-August 27. The data was transferred to Excel where we then searched for three different forms of communicating through twitter, # which allows the user's message to be displayed in a listing with other users discussing the same topic, RT@ which is a user repeating a message sent by another user and directing viewers to the original author of the message, and also which users had a link within their message.

A:

The evidence found in the content of the tweets showed that there was no real relationship between the ways twitter users posted messages about political topics or popular culture topics. The percentages between the four topics were pretty consistent on the way of communicating (e.g. using the "#" key or typing in RT@, or adding a link) with the other topics.

The topics that were discussed about politics, however, were more across the board than what was being discussed about the popular culture topics. The tweets about Barack Obama were about how he is doing, what he is doing, links to articles about him. Similarly to Obama, Bin Laden's content of the posts about him was articles about Al Queda, or people discussing his whereabouts. Jokes were retweeted a lot about each person. The messages people were sending about Lindsay Lohan and Inception were both very narrow in their discussions. Lindsay Lohan had just gotten out of rehab so people were discussing that mainly, while Inception was a lot of movie reviews or links to parodies. One interesting find was that 74% of the tweets about Lindsay Lohan were links as well as 69% of tweets about Obama.

After looking through the tweets it was discovered that the links about Obama were mainly news articles, which the links about Lindsay Lohan were directed towards gossip magazines and websites displaying pictures of her now that she has recently been released from jail/rehab.

Overall twitter users used the "#" code less often than the other forms of communicating. This is most likely due to the fact that normal people don't care as much if their tweet is read by the masses.

Links for the most part were the most popular way usage of a code for twitter users. Since users are only given 140 characters to post, it would make sense that users would rather leave a link directing to a story than having to post multiple tweets about the same topic since they ran out of space. Also it was used often as a source to information that the user was relaying to their followers. Many re-tweets that were used were to also give a source when that user repeats their message on their own twitter. Also re-tweets were used for lots of discussions and repeating jokes that they had read from a different Twitter user.

When deciding to see if Twitter users that discuss politics use different forms of communicating than those that discuss the trending topics, or popular topics at the time, the research shows that there is no evidence that suggests so. The differences in percentages had not much to do with the trending topic, but more about the form of communication. The "#" which would allow that tweet to be posted on a page with the same topic was used significantly less than the other two forms of communicating. Re-tweets were often used with links, and links were the most popular usage of communication on twitter posts.

Trending Topic				
Form of communicating	Obama	Bin Laden	Inception	Lindsay Lohan
#	16%	19%	18%	13%
http	69%	40%	31%	74%
RT@	52%	47%	22%	40%

Data:

Barack Obama Tweets.xlsx

Bin Laden Tweets.xlsx

Inception Tweets.xlsx

<u>Lindsay Lohan Tweets.xlsx</u>