Is social media making news generation & consumption better?

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Three questions

• Who is spreading news to whom?

• Why are users spreading news?
  – What incentives drive their behavior?

• How is users’ exposure to news changing?
Broad categories of users in Twitter

- **Elites**: Media organizations, celebrities, politicians, journalists
  - Have hundreds of thousands of followers
  - Very few (< 0.1% of users)

- **Enthusiasts**: Wanna-be-elites, bloggers, activists, domain experts
  - Have several hundred to thousands of followers
  - Small percentage (<1-2% of users)

- **Grassroots**: Ordinary users
  - Less than a couple of hundred followers
  - Large percentage (98-99% of users)
Who is spreading news to whom?

- Studied coverage of protests in Iran & Maldova
- Elites: necessary and sufficient to reach a majority of Twitter users
- Enthusiasts: extend the reach of elites considerably
- Grassroots: surprisingly, don’t help much!
Why are users spreading news?

• Elites: Have well understood incentives

• Grassroots: Share & discuss news with friends

• Enthusiasts: What are their incentives?
  – Altruistic desire to do social good?
  – Selfish desire to become more influential?
Incentives for enthusiasts

• In a recent study of spammers in Twitter, we found that most links to spammers come from enthusiasts!

• Many are social marketers
  – Tag cloud created from their bios:

• They often collude to increase their “influence”

• How do their goals affect what news they tweet?
How is users’ exposure to news changing?

• Are they being exposed to
  – only news they like?
  – more diverse opinions?
  – more niche stories in the long-tail?
  – more local news than global news?
  – more opinions than facts?

• How is the exposure affecting their understanding of the events?
Summary

• Is social media making news generation and consumption better?

• First, we need to better understand how social media-based news generation and consumption works

• Many basic questions still remain unanswered

• Lots of intuitive beliefs supported by anecdotal evidence

• Excellent opportunity for this community to verify existing theories and discover new ones