

# 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 & Moldova
- 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