

# Social Media & Political Engagement:

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Environmental Organizations, Social Media and Political  
Engagement

By Tyler Cate  
BSU Political Science '16



# Background

- The Internet began being used for political engagement in the late 1990's
- Social media has grown rapidly since the birth of "Web2.0" in the early 2000's
- Facebook and Twitter are used by billions of people and for a number of purposes
- Advocacy groups, governments, politicians, and political organizations all use social media

# Evolution of Internet/Social Media Activism

## Web 1.0

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- 1997: Opposition to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MIA) used websites and listservs
- 1999: Opposition to the WTO Ministerial Conference sees groups organize and mobilize through websites, listservs, message boards, and live updates (“Battle for Seattle”)

## Web 2.0

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- 2004: Facebook created
- 2006: Twitter created
- 2008: Presidential candidates use social media during campaigns
- 2013: President Obama joins Twitter
- 2016: Twitter wars between presidential candidates

# Literature Review

- Research prior to 2005 (Bimber, Kruger, Kutner) indicates skepticism about Internet activism, yet sees some possible benefit
- Research from 2005 to 2010 (Boulianne, de Zuniga et al, Gibson et al, Jensen et al) indicates an acceptance of Internet and social media influence on political activism, sees expansion in its usage, but is unsure of exactly how big of an impact it has
  - Is it just “clicktivism” or “slacktivism”?
- Research from 2010 to present (Anduiza et al, Daume et al, Gibson & Cantijoch, Hirzalla & Zoonen, Howard, Obar et al, Oser et al, Stetka & Mazak) indicates an understanding of the influence of the Internet and social media, beginnings of statistical research, and measuring of actual impact

# New Question

- How do environmental organizations use social media and is it effective in encouraging their “followers” to engage in online and/or offline political activity?
  - Is it beyond mere “clicktivism” or “slacktivism”?

# How?

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First, how do environmental organizations use their social media accounts to communicate with followers, and encourage them to engage in online or offline political engagement?

# Groups of Focus

- Large, well-known environmental groups
- Ducks Unlimited is one of the largest wetlands conservation groups
- LCV and EDF are very active with policy
- Most groups have over 400k FB followers and over 100k Twitter followers
- All groups post at least once a day on each social media platform, sometimes more

Organization	FB Followers	Twitter Followers
Ducks Unlimited	1,114,000	108,000
EDF	218,000	117,000
Greenpeace USA	462,000	155,000
LCV	249,000	14,000
NRDC	559,000	190,000
NWF	1,034,000	394,000
Nature	835,000	503,000
Oceans	656,000	162,000
Sierra Club	510,000	185,000
Wilderness	468,000	73,000

# Methodology

## Facebook

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- Contents of each post recorded: Group, date, type, target, number of “Likes,” number of “Shares,” number of comments, number of “tags” within comments, and topic
- Each posting is assigned a post/case number (1-306)
- Each post occurred during the dates mentioned in the unit of analysis

## Twitter

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- Contents of each post recorded: Group, date, type, target, number of “Likes,” number of “Retweets,” and topic
- Each posting is assigned a post/case number (1-1059)
- Each post occurred during the dates mentioned in the unit of analysis

# Unit of Analysis

- “The postings by ten different environmentally oriented organization on Facebook and Twitter corresponding to dates on which Congress was in session for November and December 2014”
- Dates: November 12-14, November 17-20, December 1-4, December 8-12, December 16
  - Congress was in session
  - Dates correspond to the 2014 Senate vote on the Keystone XL pipeline, the COP-20 in Lima, and during discussion of the EPA’s Clean Power Plan

# Type, Target, Topic, Tags

- The “type” of post is broken down into 7 categories for Facebook and 9 categories for Twitter. Type defines what kind of post is being made.
- The “target” of the post is broken down into 7 categories and corresponds to the intended audience of the post
- The “topic” of the post is broken down into 16 categories that designate what is being discussed
- “Tags” only apply to Facebook posts. They are the attaching of another person (usually, a Facebook “friend”) to a particular comment or post

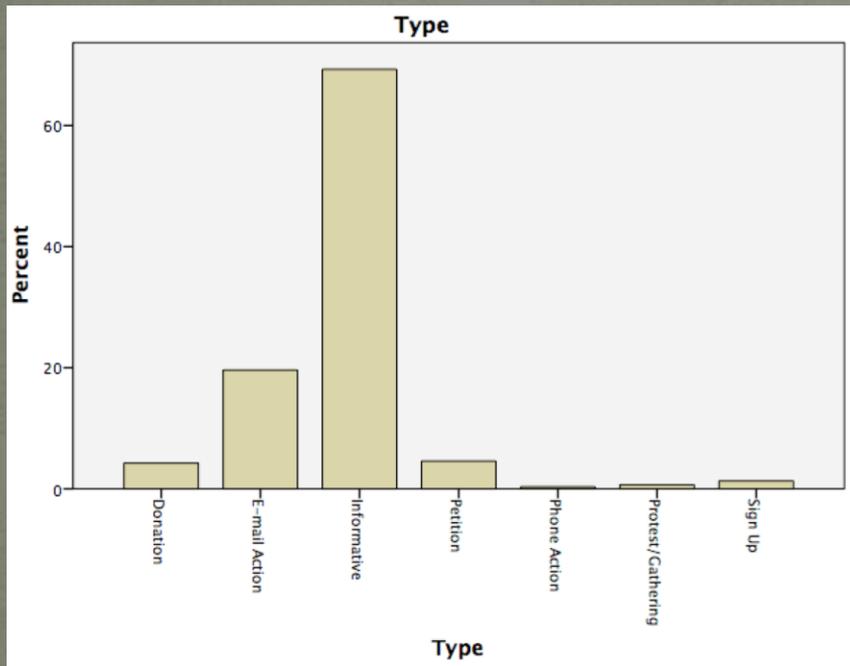
# Analysis of “How”

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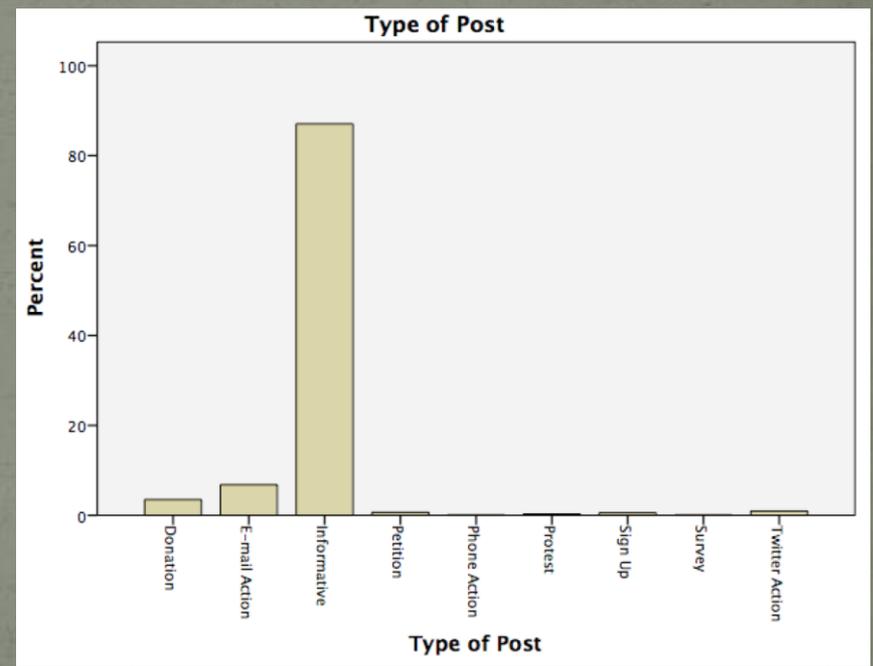
Frequencies & Cross-Tabs

# Posts by Type

## Facebook

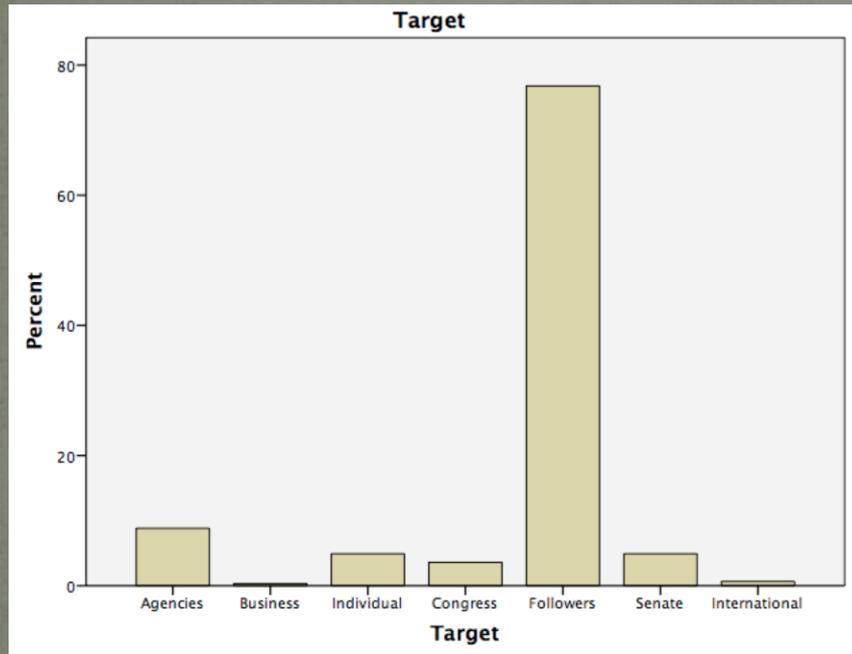


## Twitter

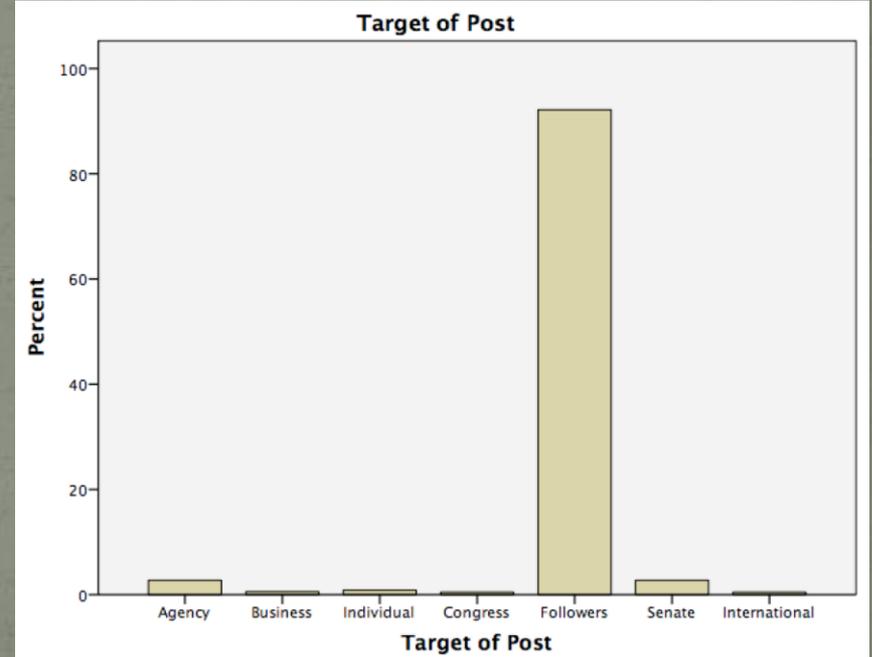


# Posts by Target

## Facebook

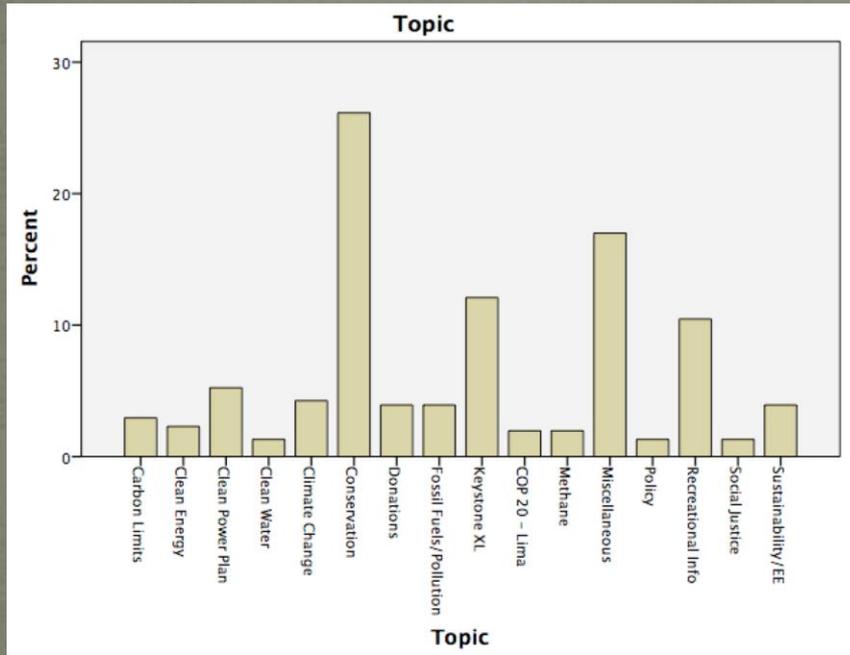


## Twitter

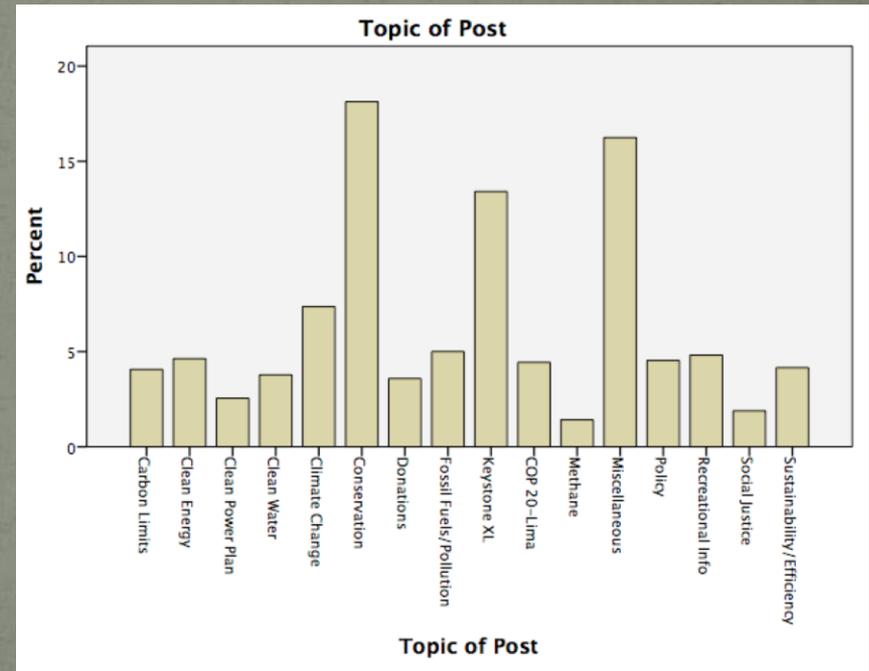


# Posts by Topic

## Facebook



## Twitter





# Summary of How Social Media is Used

## Facebook

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- Most groups will only post 1 or 2 times a day, some on weekends
- Type: Predominantly informative, but several calls for e-mail actions
- Target: Usually followers
- Topic: Varied with Conservation the most, then miscellaneous, followed by Keystone XL

## Twitter

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- Number of posts greatly vary but can be more than 10 a day
- Type: Overwhelmingly informative, but several calls for e-mail actions
- Target: Usually followers
- Topic: Conservation, miscellaneous, Keystone XL, then climate change/global warming

# Analysis of the Impact of Social Media on Political Engagement

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Is there a way to determine the effectiveness of an organization's use of social media when it comes to online/offline political engagement?

# Hypothesis

*In a study of environmental groups' Facebook and Twitter pages on days in which Congress was in session during November and December 2014, those groups that request their followers to engage in some kind of online or offline political activity achieve a greater response than those that do not.*

# Sample Cross-Tab: FB Shares & Type

			Shares					Total
			0-43	44-107	108-263	264-759	759+	
Type	Donation	N	6	3	3	1	0	13
		%	9.7%	4.8%	5.0%	1.6%	0.0%	4.2%
	E-mail Action	N	7	8	13	18	14	60
		%	11.3%	12.9%	21.7%	29.5%	23.0%	19.6%
	Informative	N	44	44	44	38	42	212
		%	71.0%	71.0%	73.3%	62.3%	68.9%	69.3%

# Summary of Effectiveness

## Facebook

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- Most “Shares” are with informative posts
- A noticeable amount of e-mail action requests are shared
- Donation calls also receive a number of shares

## Twitter

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- Most “Retweets” are with informative posts
- A noticeable amount of e-mail action requests are shared
- Donation calls and petitions also receive a number of shares

# Conclusion

- The findings of my research correspond to several research articles that indicate the value of social media as a tool to inform followers about various topics
- Comparing the various aspects of postings does indicate that groups making direct calls for some kind of action, whether online or offline, do receive a slightly better response than regular posts – however, it is dependent upon which group makes the call for action
- The topic of posts seems to somewhat correspond to current events, but can also vary

## Conclusion (cont.)

- I was not able to find a definitive bridge between online and offline activity, but seemed to have located a distinct level of online activity beyond mere “slacktivism” or “clicktivism”
- Further research should be done, but it would be extremely time consuming and, probably, expensive

# Thank you

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Thank you to Dr. Donnay, Dr. Beech, the BSU Political Science Class of 2016, and all others who helped me out!