

B1.14 Social Media Networks and the Relationships Between Citizens and Politics



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Research Questions

Strand I: The project addresses the mobilization effects of social media use by exploring protest related content communicated through Twitter during political mobilisations in Spain, Greece and the US. Specifically we study:

- Was Twitter used most extensively for spreading calls for political participation, logistical organisation and coordination or political conversation and information distribution?

Strand II: Selecting *Occupy Wall Street* as a case study the project further investigated social media users' offline engagement with the movement. Specifically we asked:

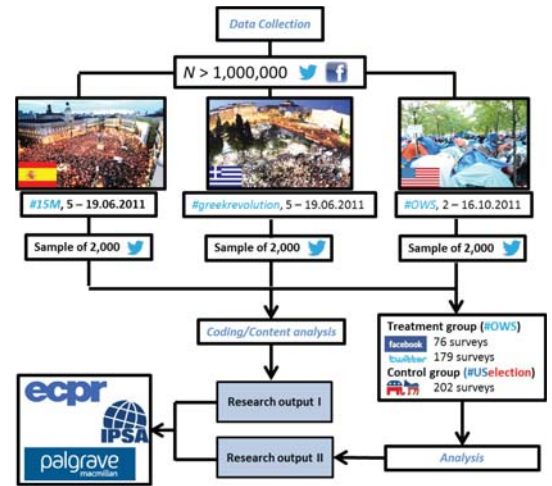
- Are the weak ties created and expanded by social media such as Twitter and Facebook likely to *promote* contentious political action by actually bringing people to the streets and allowing them to engage with the protest cause beyond the borders of cyberspace?

Data & Methods

Strand I: Using social media crawlers, we collected more than 1 million tweets during the heydays of protest in Spain, Greece and the USA. Random samples of 2,000 tweets were drawn for each country and political attitudes inscribed in these tweets were coded. Correspondence analysis ('symmetric' scaling) is used for the representation of different issues across countries.

Strand II: To further explore the relationship between online and offline participation, we contacted a sample of people who posted about the protest events and about a different political issue and asked them to fill out a brief questionnaire about their political activities. Logistic regression analyses were used to highlight the relationships between offline and online modes of participation.

Research Design



Research Findings

Use of Twitter during protest events

In the plot (Fig. 1) different purposes and different countries are represented as points in a coordinate system shown by the dotted lines. Purposes that are used equally by tweets in each country appear near the centre whereas purposes that are relatively more prevalent in one country than another are further from the centre.

- 'Call for action' is almost at the centre of the triangle formed by the three countries, indicating that this purpose is mentioned about equally by tweets in each country.
- Despite the claims of recent literature, we found that Twitter was hardly used for logistical coordination of political actions in any of the three countries considered.
- A substantial number of tweets is used for political communication in each country. Yet, the content of these tweets (topics and issues) differs between countries in very plausible ways (Fig. 2).

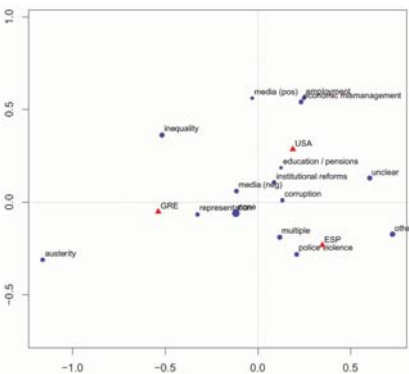


Fig.2: Correspondence analysis of issues by country

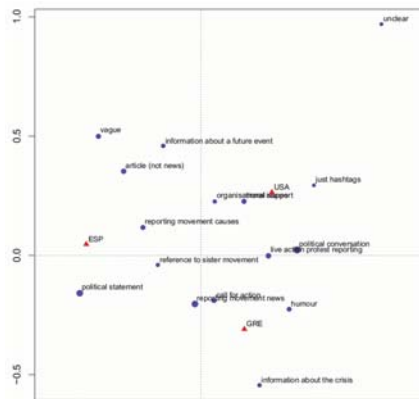


Fig.1: Correspondence analysis of purposes by country

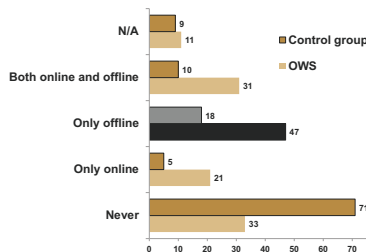


Fig.3: Online and offline participation in events organised by OWS

Online and offline participation

- Those who Facebooked/tweeted about the movement are more likely to participate in *events related to the movement* organised offline than those who tweeted about other political issues.
- Online and offline participation are, in general, *not* positively correlated. The relationship depends on the issue at stake

Research Output

Conference presentations:

- Theocharis, Y. & Garcia Albacete, G. (2012) 'Social Media and Political Mobilisation: A Comparison of the 'Occupation' Movements in Spain, Greece and the US'. Paper presented at the XXI World Congress of Political Science, 8-12 July, Madrid, Spain.
- García Albacete, G., Theocharis, Y., Lowe, W. & van Deth, J.W. (2013) 'Social Media Mobilisation as a Prompt for Offline Participation? Analysing Occupy Wall Street Twitterers' Offline Engagement with the Movement'. Paper presented at the 'Collective Action Online: Theories and Methods' workshop at the 2013 European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions of Workshops, 11-16 March 2013, Mainz, Germany.
- Theocharis, Y., Lowe, W., van Deth, J. & García Albacete, G. (2013) 'Using Twitter to Mobilise Protest Action: Transnational Online Mobilisation Patterns and Action Repertoires in the *Occupy Wall Street*, *Indignados* and *Aganaktismenoi* movements'. Paper presented at the 'The Transnational Dimension of Protest: From the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street' workshop at the 2013 European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions of Workshops, 11-16 March 2013, Mainz, Germany.

Chapters in Edited volumes:

- García Albacete, G. & Theocharis, Y. (2013). 'Opportunities and Challenges in Analysing Twitter Content: A Comparison of the Occupation Movements in Spain, Greece and the US', in Gibson, R., Cantijoh, M. & Ward, S. (eds.) *Analyzing Social Media Data and Web Networks: New Methods for Political Science*. London: Palgrave.