Communicating EU Energy Policy through Social Media:
Methodological Innovations for the Analysis of Political Communication on Twitter

Research Training #3
Seminar Coordinators:
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Seminar Overview

The use of Twitter in public communication is widespread – politicians, celebrities, news media, ordinary citizens (or 'netizens') are all trying to make their voices heard in the social media sphere. Research on the aspects of Twitter's use is growing, from studies exploring the role of Twitter in political revolutions in the Middle East, to breaking news coverage and analysis, to studies of online rumours and fraud, to studies of 'trolling'; scholars are increasingly looking to Twitter for answers about public discourse. The European Union has been an active user of web 2.0 platforms for communication, and Twitter is central to this practice. Yet little is known about how effective the EU is in 'tweeting' to the masses. To whom does the EU direct its 'tweets'? Who is listening and does anyone talk back? What conversations are being had, and how should we study them? Much of the existing research on Twitter focuses on quantitative approaches, relying on computational techniques. However, there is a growing awareness that Twitter conversations should be understood as qualitative data; a uniquely rich data that we need ways of exploring beyond simple metrics. This seminar will enable students to be at the forefront of research on European Union online communication, by introducing them to a unique Twitter dataset related to the EU's Energy Policy, and by training them in original qualitative methods which will allow them to delve into the depths of this social media discourse.

Seminar Objectives

This seminar is designed to introduce students to the study of Twitter in political communication, and to train them in qualitative methodologies for social media analysis. The focus of the seminar is a case study of political communication on Twitter relating to EU Energy Policy, but the skills and methodological tools students will learn are widely transferrable. During the seminar students will engage with current literature on Twitter as a data-source, and will be exposed to different analysis approaches (both qualitative and quantitative). By the end of the seminar, students should have an understanding of the nature of social media analysis and current research in the field, some of the challenges and issues relating specifically to Twitter analysis, and they will be trained in a particular qualitative research methodology designed for an internationally-funded research project on EU Energy Policy. On completion of the seminar, students will be asked to produce a report which will analyse the results of the data they have worked with throughout the seminar

Seminar Programme Outline

Day 1: Introductions
- Introductions
- Introduction to seminar programme
- Overview of the EU and its External Energy Policy
- Introduction to the EXIE Project
- Twitter as a media source – introduction to the field of study
- Overview of EXIE's quantitative approach: data gathering, computational techniques for analysis including Refine and NodeXL
- Homework: reading on Twitter and/or EU energy literature??

Day 2
- Discussion of homework reading
- EXIE Project research design and the theoretical basis for media analysis and Twitter
- Conceptualising political communication in Twitter
- Working with qualitative Twitter data – training in analysis methodology (2 categories)
- Practice/coder training
- Homework: practice analysis

Day 3
- Homework Review – problem-solving
- Working with qualitative Twitter data – training in analysis methodology (2-3 categories)
- Practice/coder training
- Homework: practice analysis

Day 4
- Homework Review – problem-solving
- Analysing sentiment in Twitter data
    - Discussion/overview of computer-aided analysis (Sentistrength)
    - Training in conceptual metaphor analysis
- Coder practice/training in metaphors

Day 5
- Homework Review – problem solving
- Assignment of case studies for reports
- Discussion of case studies/work plan
- Final Q&A

*Note: While we will make every attempt to follow the seminar programme outline, the schedule may alter depending on the training outcomes.