SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FORUM FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY

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IS ANYTHING ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA GOOD FOR DEMOCRACY?

Top stories

Facebook will release data about election interference — after the election
The Verge
19 hours ago

Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The Scandal and the Fallout So Far
The New York Times
20 hours ago

The Cambridge Analytica and Facebook data scandal: what you need to know
TechRadar
11 hours ago

MARKET INSIDER with PATTI DOMM

Wednesday's markets watching jobs, but it will be Trump tweets, trade headlines that could drive stocks

#RippedFromTheHeadlines
Social media are a rapidly- and ever-developing area of social and political life. Does this area matter for politics? If so, when and how?

Most research on social media and politics has focused on individual use and psychology and/or electoral campaigns.

We shift the focus to more quotidian and more local politics. We are interested in citizen interactions, but today are presenting findings about local elected officials.
We are interested in whether and how local-level politics occurs on new social media platforms.

We aim to explore this using Chicago as a case study, across these sites of activity:

1. Facebook and Twitter use by elected officials
2. Facebook and Twitter use by neighborhood civil society organizations
3. Neighborhood-level Facebook groups as a site for citizen-citizen interaction

Today, we'll be presenting initial findings from #1 (and very early info on #3).
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Norman Rockwell Museum, Curtis Publishing
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OUR QUESTIONS

- Do certain kinds of officials use social media more, or more effectively?
  - Change Over Time, Generational Digital Divide?
- Given that the forum exists, how is it used by officials and citizens?
  - Information, Deliberation, Expression?
- What topics get the most engagement?
  - “All politics is local”?
  - Or Nationalization of U.S. politics?
GOING VIRAL, MAKING WAVES: SOME HYPOTHESES ABOUT LOCAL POLITICIANS' SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- H1: “Old Dogs, New Tricks”: Younger politicians will be more likely to use social media.
- H2: “Learn on the Job”: Those who came into office more recently, especially after the spread of social media, will be more likely to use it.
- H3: “Make Waves”: more ideologically-motivated politicians, and those who aspire to higher office, will be more likely than others to take positions on supralocal issues, as well as potentially divisive cultural issues.
  - In Chicago politics, this means that we expect the self-identified members of the Progressive Caucus than their less ideologically expressive colleagues to be more likely to use social media to make statements about social, ideological, and supralocal issues.
All posts on public pages by Chicago aldermen during March 2015 to May 2018
- March 2015 is the start of the current term; we intentionally avoid periods of election campaigns
- 45 aldermen have maintained a total of 47 pages during this period
- There are \( n = 29,734 \) posts
  - Posts without text or where text is not in English are removed
  - Standard pre-processing steps are applied
  - Final number of posts is \( n = 25,370 \)
GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS
OLD DOGS, NEW TRICKS? / LEARNING ON THE JOB?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Took office</th>
<th>Mean posts during time period of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1995</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-2004</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2014</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 2015</td>
<td>746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 year -> 18 posts
(OLS with Controls)
"USE IT OR LOSE IT": PAGE LIKES~TOTAL POSTS

1 post -> 2 Page Likes
(OLS w Controls)
TOPICS OF ALDERMEN'S FACEBOOK POSTS

Percent of Posts "Best Fitting" Each Topic
MAKING WAVES? PART 1

Post Topics for Different Blocs of Aldermen

Fig [CaucusHist]: Topic distributions for Progressive Caucus and "Rubber Stamp" Aldermen
MAKING WAVES? PART 2

Monthly Frequency of Posts on State and National Politics
MAKING WAVES? PART 2

Regression of likes count on all topics

Excluded category is Topic 4. Controls for alderman and month included but not reported.
SUMMARY OF EARLY FINDINGS ON LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Youth and recency of officeholding are related to social media use, but only modestly
  - Competitiveness of previous election also matters
  - There may be a political learning story here
- "Use it or lose it"
- Topics
- Supralocal affairs are distinctive:
  - Some aldermen post on them more
  - They garner MUCH more engagement
### EARLY FINDINGS ON NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group type</th>
<th>Number of groups</th>
<th>Proportion &quot;open&quot;</th>
<th>Total members</th>
<th>Average members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General news</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>163,466</td>
<td>163,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community of affinity</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>115,111</td>
<td>115,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically political</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>30,703</td>
<td>30,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime reports</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>74,112</td>
<td>2,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>39,128</td>
<td>954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garage sale</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>260,960</td>
<td>2,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>169,303</td>
<td>1,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with city or alderman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EARLY FINDINGS ON NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS

THANK YOU!