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Twitter and Political and Civic Engagement: Is There a Relationship?

Ashleigh Morpeau

University at Albany, State University of New York

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Twitter and political and civic engagement: Is there a relationship?

Abstract:

Social Networking sites have become an integral part of today's society and have changed the way people communicate with one another. In this paper, I discuss the relationship between Twitter and civic and political engagement among 18-25-year olds. I conducted a survey at the University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY Albany) campus to see if there is a relationship between Twitter usage and civic and political engagement. 198 students completed the surveys. The results of my study showed that SUNY Albany students who use Twitter were more political engaged than those students who did not use Twitter and Twitter users were more civically engaged than those who did not have Twitter. My research suggest that a there is a relationship between Twitter and political engagement as well as between Twitter and civic engagement; however no definitive conclusion could be made based on the data. Further analysis shows that, among Twitter users, those who follow politicians and news outlets as well as tweeting about politics and the news were more politically engaged than those Twitter users that did not engage in those activities on Twitter. A relationship between those Twitter activities and political engagement does exist. This research is the first of its kind, but more research into this subject must be done.

Introduction

Twitter: What is it and how does one use it?

With about 200 million users (Shiels ,2011), Twitter has become one of the fastest growing micro-blogging /social networking site. Although Twitter was created as a means of communication between friends, it has evolved into a global platform for information exchange.

Newspapers, magazine, and other journalistic mediums are using Twitter to reach their audiences (Arceneaux et al., 2010), and audiences are responding. Eighty five percent of trending topics on Twitter are headline news or persistent news in nature (Kwak et al., 2010). Companies use Twitter to advertise products, while politicians, political, and civic organizations use Twitter to communicate with citizens. Using the “@” symbol, users can direct their tweets to particular users as a means of carrying out a conversation. Environmental organizations have used this feature to incorporate their followers into their campaign (Campbell, 2010). Twitter's

“retweet” feature, which allows the user to repost information that another user has originally posted. It is truly a vital part of Twitter and how it is able to disseminate information quickly to a large audience. A statistical analysis of retweets reveals that any tweet that has been “retweeted” can reach an average of 1,000 users no matter what the number of followers is of the original tweet (Kwak et al., 2010).

Politicians are also using this micro-blogging site to reach out to constituents, with varying success (Grant et al., 2010). Interestingly, an examination of the use of electronic media, including Twitter, during the 2007 Nigerian elections revealed that there is a dialectical relationship between social media discourse and the process of political empowerment (Ifukor, 2010). In other words, the use of social media as a form of communication has an influence on the process of political empowering citizens and vice versa. Access to the social media leads to a new relationship between citizens and elected officials, in which discourse occurs more freely, allowing more involvement in democratic governance. Using Twitter to discuss political issues has also been observed in Germany, where political sentiments and discourse on Twitter reflect the offline political discussion (Tumasjan et al., 2010).

In recent news, Twitter has shown its political potential. In conjunction with other social networking sites, such as Facebook and Youtube, Egyptian protesters used Twitter to organize mass protest (Preston, 2011). Iranian citizens also used Twitter as means of expressing their opinions during the 2007 election (Burns et al., 2009). Many speculate if social networking sites and other forms of social media, like Twitter, can lead to a more democratic society or, at the least, lead to an increase in political and civic engagement among citizens.

The literature on the relationship between political and civic engagement and social networking sites are limited, but the scholarship on general online usage and political and civic involvement can give insight into that relationship. Tolbert et al. (2003) conducted a survey to measure the impact of Internet access on voting pattern. The results of the study proved that those who had access to the Internet and online election news (controlling for all other factors) were more likely to have voted in the 1996 and 2000 elections.

A survey conducted on 6,330 16 years-old in Belgium, suggest that Internet usage does not have an effect on likelihood of participating in the public sphere (Quintelier et al., 2008). However, the study also revealed that certain online activities, such as “chatting with unknown people, blogging and contributing messages to discussion groups, purchasing or selling things, following the news, and forwarding political e-mails affect the youth’s political involvement in a positive way” (Quintelier et al., 2008 p. 424). Although these activities are positively correlated with political involvement, a causal relationship has yet to be established. Di Gennaro et al. (2006) conducted research based on data collected from the Oxford Internet Survey (OXIS) of Internet adoption and use in Britain in 2003 and 2005. They found evidence supporting the notion that the frequency of Internet usage has a significant impact on whether a person becomes politically engaged online regardless of age, political interest, or political efficacy. In addition, Internet usage impacts the information seeking behaviors of younger groups, who use the Internet the most and are the most likely to use the Internet to look for political information.

Lin et al. (2010) conducted a study on Internet usage among Asian youth yielded some very interesting results. Data collected among youths aged between 12 and 17 in Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, and Tokyo in 2007. The results of this study, although entertainment-related activities are the most popular form of Internet use, the Internet may foster citizenship

among Asian youth. 65% of those studied read online news, about half have ever voted online and one in five ever signed an online petition (Lin et al., 2010).

Kahne et al (2011) research shows that interest driven and politically driven online have been shown to have a positive relationship with political and civic engagement Political driven online participation include discussing, identifying, producing information about, and communicating with others online about civic or political issues. Interest driven online participation includes those activities that allow people to pursue interest in hobbies, popular culture, new technology, games, and sports (Ito et al., 2009). Studying the relationship between young adults' online activity and political and civic involvement, Kahne et al (2011) reveals that non-political interest driven online participation can “serve as a gateway to participation in important aspects of civic and, at times, political life, including volunteering, engagement in community problem-solving, protest activities, and political voice” (p. 20). This study also concludes that political driven online participation may help promote increase political engagement, but not in all areas. Another type of online participation, friendship driven online participation, which include activities that enable people to socialize as well as form and maintain relationships via the Internet, seems to have no relations with political and civic engagement.

There are scholars who believe, however, that the social aspect of online usage is a contributing factor in the relationship between Internet usage and civic and political engagement. The notion of social capital refers to the resources accumulated through the relationships among people (Coleman 1998). Putnam (1995) explores this concept of social capital defining in as “features of social life-networks, norms, and trust-that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (p. 664-665). The social bonds that we form through

Internet usage have been connected to civic and political participation. Zhang & al. (2006) proved that social connectedness enhances both civic and political participation.

Social networking sites are online forums that breed social bonds. As the name suggest social networking sites encourages networking, allowing people to maintain and build relationship via Internet. Young internet users have stated that they do use these sites to stay connected with friends and form new friendships (Salaway et al. 2008). Perhaps, these sites could enhance civic and political participation.

Valenzuela et al (2009) study on the use of Facebook, arguably the most popular social networking site, explored the relationship between Facebook usage and its relationship to student life satisfaction, trust and participation (civic and political). This study seems to contradict the finding on friendship driven online participation. The study is based on the premise that social bonds and friendships on Facebook contributes to a person's social capital, which then leads to environment with foster civic and political participation. The study does show that there is a positive relationship between the intensity of Facebook use and civic and political participation; however, the associations between the Facebook variables and the dependent variables were small. For this reason, the author of this study concludes that social networking sites are not an effective means to ameliorate the problem of youth civic and political disengagement. Nonetheless, a relationship still exists.

Whether this relationship is consistent among all social networking sites has yet to be proven. In some aspects, Twitter is similar to Facebook, in that it is used as means of political, interest, and friendship driven online participation. The studies that have been conducted on Facebook could give insight to the relationship between Twitter and political and civic

engagement. But perhaps the structural difference between these sites could reveal a difference in their relationships with civic and political participation. Twitter is a micro-blogging site as well as a social networking site and is limited in the ways users can participate on the site. Unlike Facebook, Twitter users are limited to how much they can say in one posting. In addition, Twitter users do not have access to applications, such as creating groups. More importantly, the relationships on Twitter are not the same as Facebook. “Friends” on Facebook form a mutual relationship, in which both parties can view and receive updates on the other’s profile. On Twitter the relationship is different. For example, Twitter user A can “follow” Twitter user B, without having Twitter user B “follow” A. This type of non-reciprocal relationship is common on Twitter. 67.6% of users are not followed by any of the people whom they follow on Twitter and only 22.1% of users pairs are reciprocal (Kwak et al., 2010). A non-reciprocal relationship means that one user is following another user for information as opposed to carrying on a conversation. This could suggest that Twitter is more of a source of information rather than a social networking site. Twitter’s effect on civic and political participation could be similar to that of Facebook, but at this point it is uncertain. Knowing how Twitter users are using Twitter it’s the first step to determining if whether there is a relationship between Twitter usage and political and civic engagement. If Twitter is being used more as a social networking site, in which users build and maintain relationships via Twitter, then perhaps, like Facebook, it will have a positive relationship with civic and political engagement.

Twitter Facts

Pew Research Center 's Internet & American Life Project (2010) has recently conducted a survey which gives more insight into who is using Twitter and how those people are using it. The research concluded that eight percent of Americans who use the Internet use Twitter. This study also discusses the activities of American Twitter users. 72% of Twitter users post updates related to their personal life, activities or interests, with 19% doing so once a day or more; 62% post updates related to their work life, activities or interests, with 12% doing so on a daily basis; 55% of these Twitter users share links to news stories, with 12% doing so at least once a day; 54% of these Twitter users say they post humorous or philosophical observations about life in general, with 16% doing so on a daily basis; 53% of these Twitter users use Twitter to retweet material posted by others, with 18% doing so on a daily basis; and 52% of these Twitter users send direct messages to other users, with 11% doing so on a daily basis (Smith, 2010).

Most Twitter activities seem to center around personal and work interest. The activities of Twitter use seem to reflect interest driven online participation, which has a positive relationship with civic and political participation. In addition, Twitter users interact with one another by sharing photos and personal information as well as direct tweets at other users, which is a way to converse on Twitter. These activities suggest that Twitter is being used to interact with other users, to form/maintain a social bond. For these reasons, I hypothesized that Twitter will have a positive relationship with civic and political engagement. Research on Twitter activities proves that like Facebook, Twitter has a social aspect to it. It is the building of social capital that, I believe, will foster a relationship between Twitter usage and civic and political engagement.

Research/Hypothesis

Pew Research Center 's Internet & American Life Project (2010) has also revealed that 14% of American Internet users are between the age of 18-29 use Twitter, which is higher (double) the percentage of the other age groups (7% of 30-49, 6% 50-64, 4% 65+) (Smith 2010). A 2009 study of Twitter reveals that 65% of Twitter users are under the age of 25 (Cheng et al. 2009). Since Twitter users are more likely to be the ages of 18-29, I want to focus my research on what percentage of people in this age group actually uses Twitter and how they are using it. It is known that people of this age group are also least likely to vote and be political involved. I want to test if Twitter users of this age group are more politically engaged than non-Twitter users.

My hypotheses are as follows:

H1. Twitter users are more likely than non-users to be more political engaged; therefore Twitter usage has a positive relationship with political engagement (Twitter users \rightarrow + Political Engagement).

Twitter activities classify as interest driven online participation as well as contribute to the building of social bonds, which both have a positive relationship with political engagement, therefore Twitter usage should be positively related to political engagement.

H2. Twitter users are more likely than non-users to be more civically engaged than non-users, therefore Twitter usage has a positive relationship with civic engagement (Twitter users \rightarrow + Civic Engagement).

Twitter activities classify as interest driven online participation as well as contribute to the building of social bonds, which both have a positive relationship with civic engagement, therefore Twitter usage should be positively related to civic engagement. In addition, to testing

these hypotheses, I will also observe what activities users (between the ages of 18-25) engage in on Twitter.

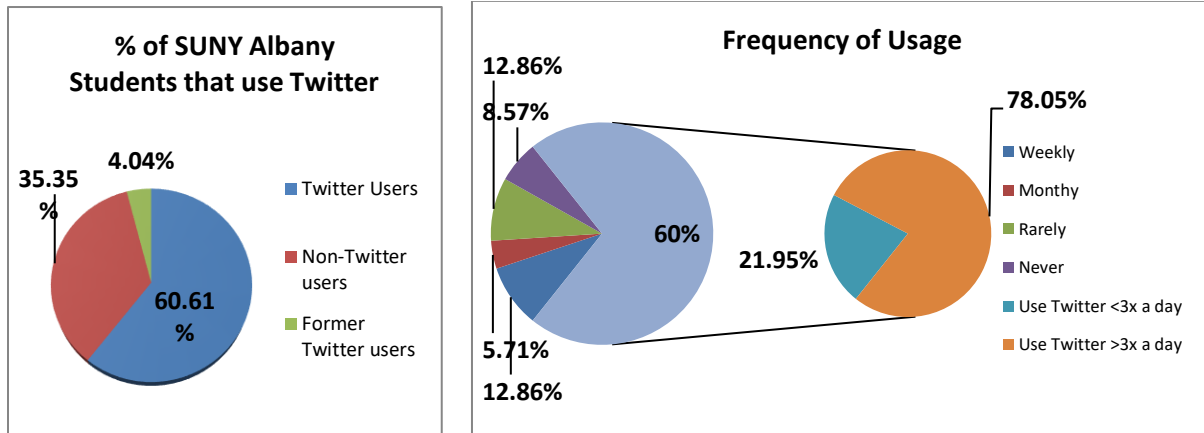
Methodology

To test my hypothesis, I conducted a survey at the University at Albany. The survey was administered in the Campus Center from April 1st 2011 to April 11th 2011 between the hours 10am and 3:30 pm. I choose this location because it is the center of campus. All students, those who commute and those who dorm, pass through the Campus Center. The campus center is most populated during the hours of 10am-3:30pm of students who live on and off campus. Conducting a survey during that time and that location would provide the most representative sample. 198 of students were willing to take my survey. In addition to surveying students in the campus center, I also conducted my survey in an honors political science course. The students for that class were 20 of the 198 students that I surveyed. After collection the data, the responses were coded (**see Appendix A**). The coded data was then entered into a spread sheet for analysis. Using a statistical software know as STATA, I was able to compute the data and run chi square test to test out my hypothesis. Before I present the result of study, I will present data on Twitter users at SUNY Albany and what activities they engage in on Twitter.

Twitter Usage and Activities

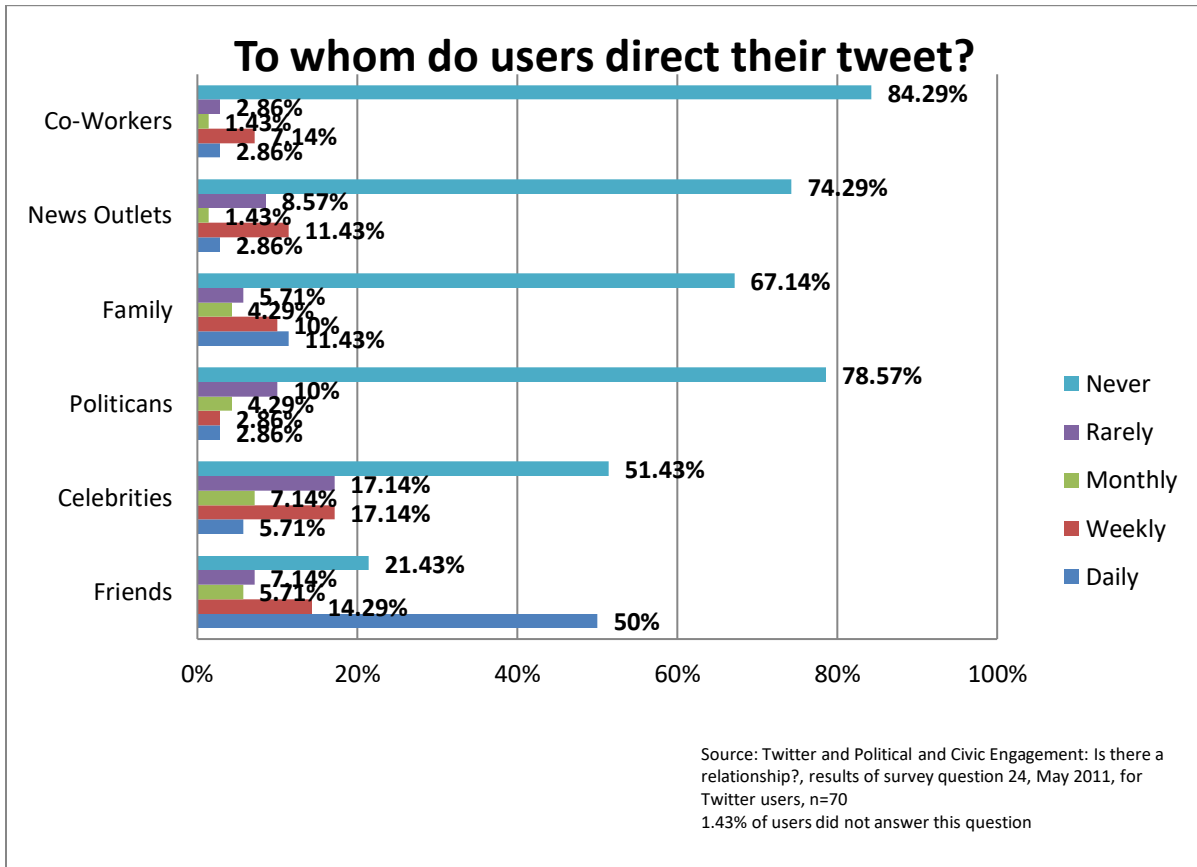
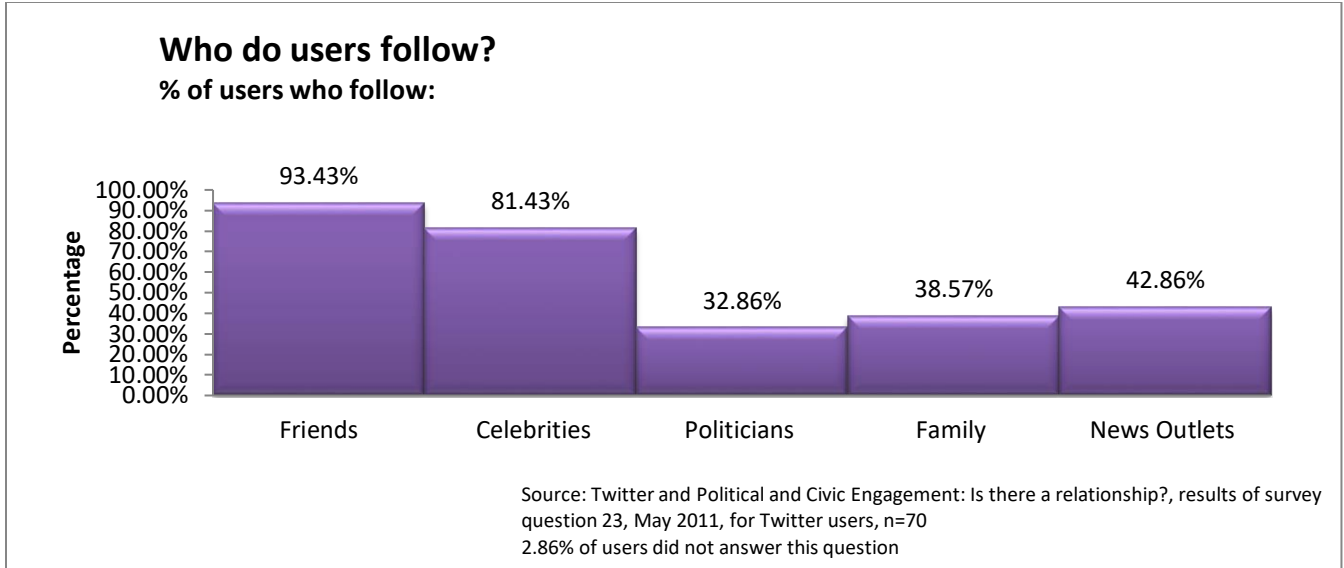
Of the 198 people surveyed only 70 (35.35%) reported that they currently have a Twitter account and 8 (4.04%) reported once having a Twitter account but no longer have an account. Most students (120 or 60.61%) never had a Twitter account. 40% of Twitter users identified

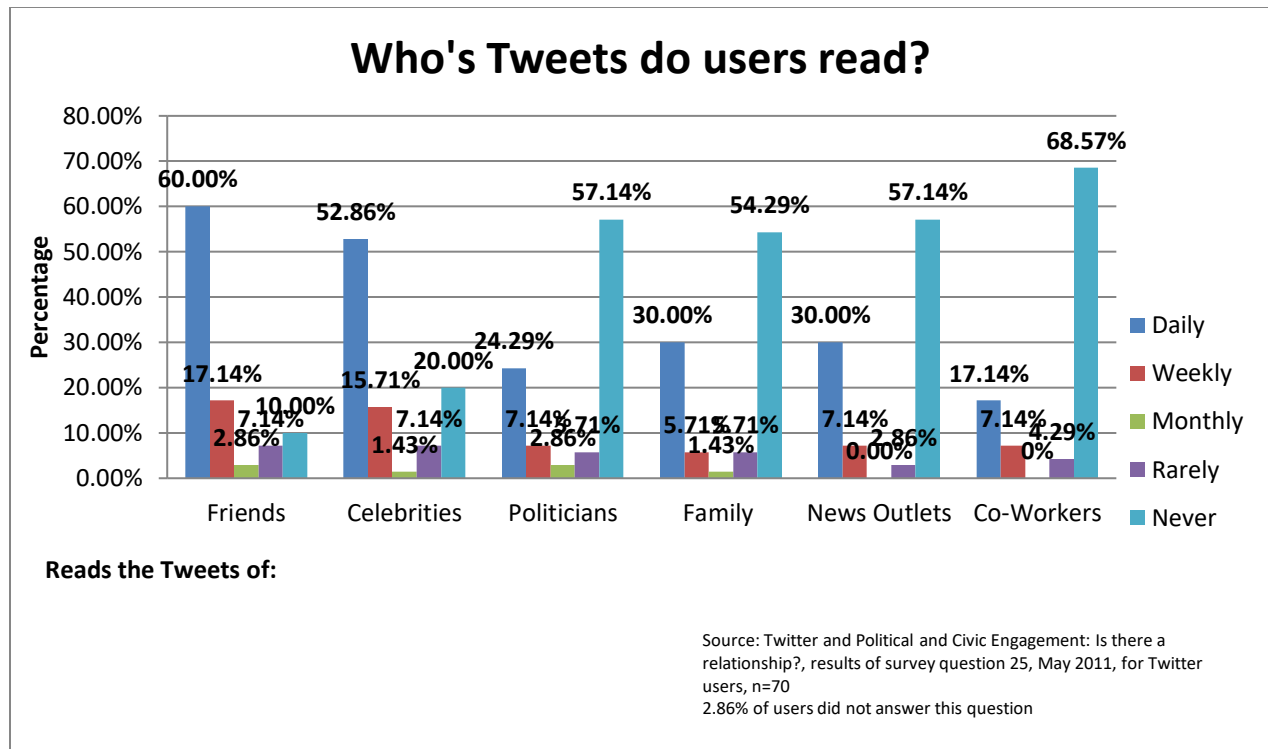
themselves as male, and 60% identified as female. Of those who use Twitter, 60% use Twitter daily, with 78.05 % of daily users checking Twitter three times and more times a day.



In comparison with American Internet users, of which 8% of people have a Twitter account (Smith, 2010), SUNY Albany students are Twitter active.

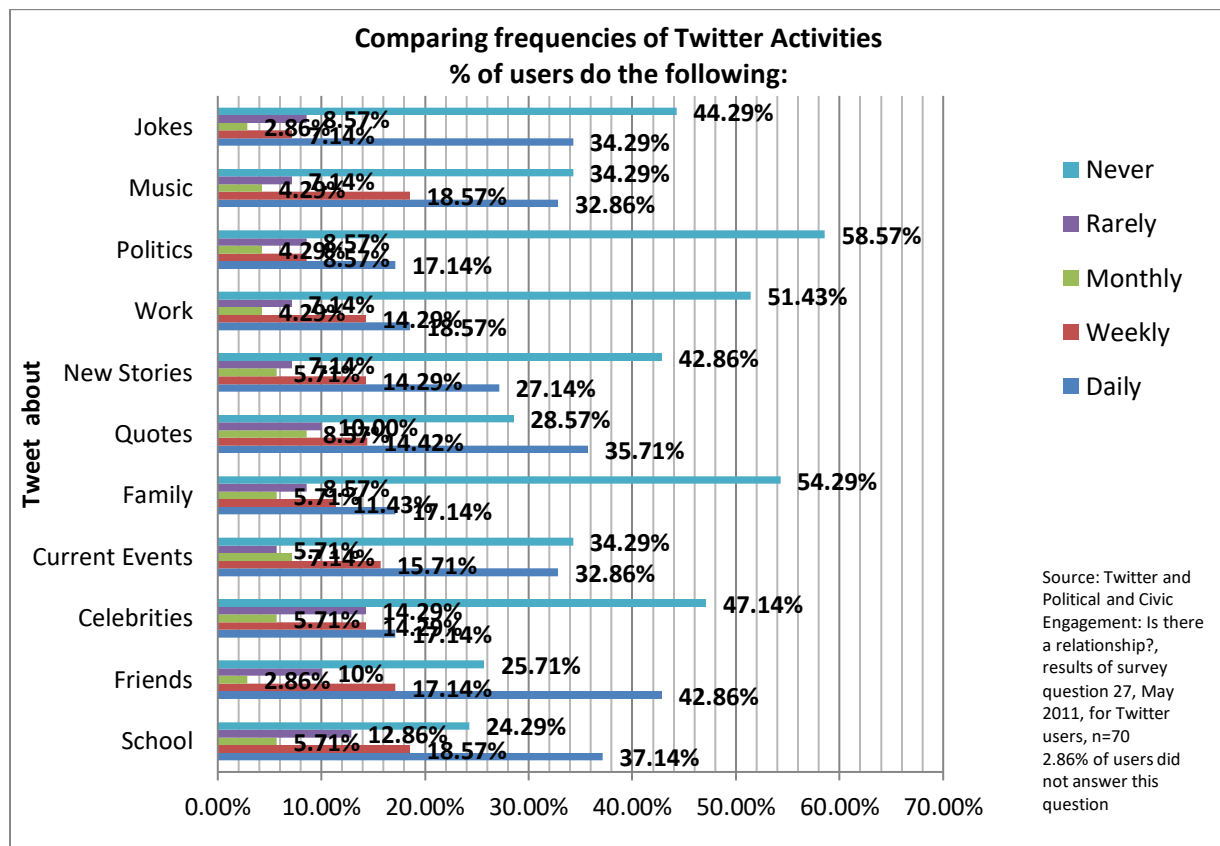
It is important to see what activities users are engaging in on Twitter. The kinds of activities that users engage in on Twitter give us insight into the primary function of Twitter. The following is the data on what activities Twitter users at SUNY Albany engage in. These activities include following other users (what groups of people do most users follow), tweets that users reads (whose tweets do users read), whom do users converse with and what do users tweet about. It is known that Twitter has been used for various purposes, from promoting products to expressing one's view. But is this type of behavior common among most Twitter users (users between the ages of 18-25)? What purpose does Twitter serve in their daily lives? The Pew Research Center (2010) study states that Twitter users use Twitter in ways that reflect their personality and use Twitter mostly to share information about their life. My research concludes the same.





This data reveals that users are not using Twitter for political purposes or to stay informed about current events. Less than a third of users (32.86%) of users follow politicians on Twitter and little less than half of all users follow news outlets (42.86%). Most users follow friends and celebrities. When asked “with whom do you have conversations” (see **question 24, appendix A**), friends were the top group of people with whom users interacted with via Twitter. Politicians and news outlets were the group with whom users interacted with the least (78.57% of Twitter users never interacted with politicians and 74.29% of users never conversed with news outlets via Twitter). When asked “of the people you follow whose Tweets you read” (**question 25, appendix A**), again friends were group, whom tweets users read the most (with 60% of users reading their friends tweets daily). Politicians and news outlets whom tweets users read the least (57.14% of users never read the postings of politicians and news outlet).

From this data, it can be concluded that relationship formed on Twitter are strongest amongst friends. Users who follow politicians and news outlets enjoy a one sided relationship, in which users rarely, if ever, interact with politicians and news outlets and with the minority of users (around 42%) ever reading the post of news outlets and politicians. This suggests that Twitter users (SUNY Albany students who use Twitter) primarily use Twitter as a means of communicating with friends and getting information about friends. In fact, when students were asked why did they created a Twitter account (see question 19, appendix A) most people responded either to “keep up with friend” or because of Twitter popularity. Only one person list “to stay informed about current events” a reason creating a Twitter account. The following data on what users Tweet about also reinforces the notion that users use Twitter as a means of communicating between friends and sharing personal information.



Friends, school, quotes, jokes, and music are the top five subjects Twitter users tweeted the most about. While politics, family, work, celebrities, and news stories are the subjects that users tweet about the least. Politics and news are among those subjects that users Tweet the least about (58.57% of users never tweet about politics and 42.86% never tweet about news stories.). This suggests that most Twitter users (between the ages of 18-25 at UAlbany) are not using Twitter as a way to express their political ideologies or engage political discourse. And although 65.22% of users retweet (repost the status of other users), 64.06% of users never retweet political tweets (see **appendix C**).

Nonetheless, the activities that Twitter users engage in reflect interest driven online activities are positively related to civic and political engagement (Kahne et al 2011). In addition, users seem to use Twitter to strengthen their social ties, existing friends, strengthen social connectedness, which is also positively related to civic and political engagement (Zhang et al. 2006). Despite users' lack of political engagement on Twitter, there is still a possibility that users are political engaged. The following section describes the methodology used to test my hypotheses and the results of my study.

Measuring Political Participation and Civic Engagement

By definition, "Political participation refers to those activities by those private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing that selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take." (Verba, 1987 p. 2). Political participation/engagement is not limited to voting. Being politically engaged can include activities such as working for the community and attending a protest (Verba et al., 1995). Even media use and news attention have

been identified as markers of participation (Zaller, 1992). Civic engagement refers to actions aimed at making “a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” (Ehrlich, 2000 p. vi). Questions from the survey in regards to political and civic engagement fell within the scope of these definitions. These broad definitions allow for us to consider various forms of civic and political engagement.

To measure how politically involved students are, I posed a series of questions that were related to political activities. Question 6, 7, 8 and 9 (**see appendix A for full survey**) inquire about student voting history. Voting was not restricted to local, state, and federal election, but also includes voting in Student Association’s (University at Albany’s version of student government) various elections. Question 11 (A, B, C, D, E, F, K, & J) posed several question aimed to measure students’ level of political engagement by assessing which kinds of political activities students engaged in. These questions asked if a student had ever: (a) Contacted a government official at any level of government to express your opinion;(b) Worked for a political party or Candidate; (c) Contributed money for a political Campaign; (d) Attended a political meeting, rally, or speech ;(e) Displayed a political button, sticker, sign; (f) Signed an e-mail or written petition about a political issue (j) Try to persuade others to vote in an election ;(k) Brought certain products for political, ethical, or environmental. Student could have responded to these questions by selection, *yes (within the past year)*, *yes (ever)* or *no (never)*. Level of political engagement depended on the responses to these questions. Students, who answered, *yes (within the past year)* or *yes (ever)* to five of the eight questions that received a political engagement (PE) score of 1. Those who answered *yes (within the past year)* or *yes*

(*ever*) to four or less of these questions received a PE score of 2. A PE score of 1 represent those who are the most politically engaged (those who engaged in a majority of the political activities listed in on the survey/Q11 A, B, C, D, E, F, K, & J) and 2 represent those who are the least politically engaged (those who did NOT engage in a majority of the political activities listed in on the survey/Q11 A, B, C, D, E, F, K, & J). Overall SUNY Albany students are not very politically engaged, with only 30.81% receiving a PE score of 1(see appendix C). It must be noted that voting was not included in coding PE scores.

Similarly to assessing political engagement, there were questions on the survey that measured civic engagement (Q11 G, H & I) by asking whether students had engaged in a particular activity. These questions asked if a student has ever: (g) worked or volunteered on a community project ;(h) worked or volunteered for non political groups such as hobby club or student associate group; (i) Raise money for a charity or ran/biked for a charity. Students could have responded to these questions by selection, *yes (within the past year)*, *yes (ever)* or *no (never)*. Again, the level of civic engagement depended on the responses to these questions. Those who answered *yes (within the past year)* or *yes (ever)* to at least two out of the three questions, received a CE (civic engagement) score of 1. Those who answered *yes (within the past year)* or *yes (ever)* to one or fewer questions received a CE score of 2. 1 represented those who are the most civically engaged (those who engaged in a majority of the civic activities listed in on the survey/Q11 G, H & I and 2 represented those who are the least civically engaged (those who did NOT engage in a majority of the civic activities listed in on the survey/Q11 G, H & I). Overall SUNY Albany students are civically engaged with 78.46% (see appendix C) receiving a PE score of 1. Twitter usage was measured by asking students if they currently have a Twitter or account or not. Using these PE and CE score I ran a chi square test to test my hypotheses. Chi

square test (chi square test of independence) is used to determine whether there is a significant association between the two variables.

Results

My hypotheses are as follows:

H1. Twitter users are more likely than non-users to be more political engaged; therefore Twitter usage has a positive relationship with political engagement (Twitter users → + Political Engagement)

H2. Twitter users are more likely than non-users to be more civically engaged than non-users, therefore Twitter usage has a positive relationship with civic engagement (Twitter users → + Civic Engagement)

H1: Twitter users → + Political Engagement

For hypothesis 1 these were the results (all chi square charts were taken directly from STATA):

Key			
	<i>frequency</i>		
	<i>row percentage</i>		
	<i>column percentage</i>		
PE score; level of political engagement			
Twitter Usage	1	2	Total
0	30 25.00 53.57	90 75.00 67.16	120 100.00 63.16
1	26 37.14 46.43	44 62.86 32.84	70 100.00 36.84
Total	56 29.47 100.00	134 70.53 100.00	190 100.00 100.00
Pearson chi2(1) = 3.1360 Pr = 0.077			

25% of people who do not have Twitter (coded as 0) received a PE score of 1, while 37.14% of Twitter users (coded as 1) received a PE score of 1. 75% of non-users received a PE score of 2 and 62.86% of Twitter users received a PE score of 2. The chi square test reveals that

a larger percentage of Twitter users were classified as being most political engaged than non-users and that a smaller percentage of Twitter users were classified as being least political engaged than non-users. The chi square test produced a Pr value of .077. Typically for chi square tests done on STATA, Pr value of .05 and lower are considered statistically significant. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that there is a relationship between Twitter usage and political engagement. The results of the chi square test show no statistical significance, but because the pr values fall just outside the threshold .05 the result have some merit. These results are evidence that there a great possibility that a relationship exist, but more research must be conducted to reach a definitive conclusion.

Hypothesis 2: Twitter users → +Civic Engagement

key			
<i>frequency</i>			
<i>row percentage</i>			
<i>column percentage</i>			
	CE score; level of civic engagement		
Twitter Usage	1	2	Total
0	87 73.11 60.00	32 26.89 76.19	119 100.00 63.64
1	58 85.29 40.00	10 14.71 23.81	68 100.00 36.36
Total	145 77.54 100.00	42 22.46 100.00	187 100.00 100.00

Pearson chi2(1) = 3.6891 Pr = 0.055

73.11% of people who do not use Twitter receive a CE score of 1, while 85.29% of Twitter users received a CE score of 1. 26.89% of non-users received a CE score of 2, while 14.71% of users received a CE score of 2. The chi square test reveals that the larger percentage of Twitter user are classified as being the most civically engaged than non-Twitter users that a smaller percentage of Twitter users were classified as being least civically engaged than non-

users. The chi square test produced a Pr score of .055; therefore these results do not have any statistical significance. Again Pr value of .05 and lower are considered statistically significant. However since the Pr value is extremely close to 0.5 cut off, these results are not without merit. These results suggest that a relationship does exist, however further research must be done before a definitive conclusion can be made.

The results of my study show that Twitter users are more civically and politically engaged than non-users, but a relationship between Twitter usage and civic and political engagement could not be established.

More Results

In addition to running chi square tests for my original hypotheses, I also ran a chi square test to see if there was a relationship between Twitter users that follow politicians and political engagement as well as those users who follow news outlets and political engagement. The following are the results:

Following politicians → +PE

Following news outlets → +PE

Key
frequency
row percentage
column percentage

PE score; level of political engagement			
Following Politicians	1	2	Total
1	12 52.17 48.00	11 47.83 24.44	23 100.00 32.86
2	13 27.66 52.00	34 72.34 75.56	47 100.00 67.14
Total	25 35.71 100.00	45 64.29 100.00	70 100.00 100.00

Pearson chi2(1) = 4.0421 Pr = 0.044

Key
frequency
row percentage
column percentage

PE score; level of political engagement			
Following News Outlets	1	2	Total
1	16 53.33 64.00	14 46.67 31.11	30 100.00 42.86
2	9 22.50 36.00	31 77.50 68.89	40 100.00 57.14
Total	25 35.71 100.00	45 64.29 100.00	70 100.00 100.00

Pearson chi2(1) = 7.0985 Pr = 0.008

52.17% of Twitter users that follow politicians on Twitter received a PE score of 1 (considered to be more politically engaged), while 27.66% of users who do not follow politicians received a PE score of 1. 47.83% of users that follow politicians received a PE score of 2, while 72.34 % of users who do not follow politicians received a PE score of 2. With a Pr value of .044 (statistically significant), this test does reveal that there is a relationship between that Twitter activity of following politicians and political engagement. A strong relationship between the Twitter activity of following news outlets and political engagement were proven. 53.33% of users who followed news outlets received a PE score of 1, while 22.50% of users who do not follow news outlets received a PE score of 1. 46.67 % of those who follow politicians received a PE score of 2, while users that do not follow politicians received a PE score of 2. The chi square test revealed a Pr value of .008, a value of statistical significances. Although over all Twitter usage cannot be proven to have a relationship with political and civic engagement, certain Twitter activities (following politicians and news outlets/reading politicians' tweets and news outlets tweets) do have a relationship with political engagement. Those who use Twitter for political purposes are more political engaged. These results are expected, for users are using Twitter as a means of engaging in activities that reflect their interests.

Conclusion

The results of my studies did not prove my hypotheses to be true, but suggest that there is a greater possibility that my hypotheses could be true. The Pr values for these chi square tests fall outside the .05 threshold of being statistically significant. Since these values are close to being statistically significant, these results cannot be simple ignored. The results provide an incentive for future research. It must be noted that this study was conducted with a sample size of 198 students from the SUNY Albany campus. Although SUNY Albany has a diverse student body, it is not representative of all Twitter users. Twitter transcends SUNY Albany, with users from all over the globe. To make a definitive conclusion in regards to the relationship between Twitter usage and civic and political engagement, this study must be reformed to include a larger sample size.

In addition to sample size, the questions assessing political and civic engagement did not include every activity which would fall under the broad definition of civic and political engagement. Perhaps more questions assessing civic and political engagement should be added in future studies to better assess the engagement levels of Twitter users and non-users. In my study, it did not include voting in the PE scores, even though voting classified as a form of political participation. Most students were ineligible or did not vote in most elections (**see appendix B**); for that reason I did not including voting in the PE score. Future research should include voting patterns in assessing levels of political engagement.

A larger percentage of Twitter users were classified as being the most political and civically engaged, but reasoning behind this phenomenon could not be determined. My research attempted to find a cause to this relationship, but the methods with insufficient. A more in-depth analysis on Twitter activities augmented with interviews with Twitter users, in my opinion, would give more insight into why Twitter users are more politically and civically engaged than

non-users. Also an analysis of the structure of the Twitter (profile lay-out, character limitation, privacy setting, capacity to form groups, etc) should also be included in future studies of Twitter and social networking sites in general. The structure of a site impacts how people communicate with on other. For example, Twitter users are limited to 140 character conversation, while Facebook users have the option of send limitless message via private messaging, wall post, or enabling the chat function. These differences in communications could possibly affect how users view the relationship that they form on these sites, and affect their social capital (Putman, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to see a relationship exists between Twitter usage and political engagement as well a relationship between Twitter usage and civic engagement. Although the results of this study did not provide any definitive conclusions, this research is the first quantitative analysis on the relation between Twitter and political and civic engagement. Perhaps, this research is premature, considering Twitter has been around for only 5 years and became popular with in the last two to three years. But, I believe that this research lays a foundation for future research in this area.

Research of this kind is difficult to conduct due to the speed at which social networking sites transform. Twitter and social networking sites in general change quicker than we can study them. When I started researching Twitter in December 2009, Twitter had about 16 million users. As of March 2011, Twitter has 200 million users and the number is still growing. It must be noted that social networking site come and go. Once popular sites such as Myspace and Sconex, have lost the membership. Facebook use has increase from 89% in 2008 to 97% in 2010, while MySpace use decreased from 48% to 22% (Smith et al. 2010). There is a possibility that Twitter might not be around in the next five years to be studied. Nonetheless, social networking sites are

here to stay. Despite the future of Twitter, this research offers more insight into the larger area of the influence social networking sites have on our political and civic behavior.

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Appendix A: Survey and Code Book

CODE BOOK

****0=NO RESPONSE**

1. Sex ___Male ___Female	Q1. Male=1 Female=2
2. Age group: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <18• 18-25• 25-30• 31-40• 41>	Q2. 1=<18 2=18-25 3=25-30 4=31-40 5=41>
3. What is your declared major? (put N/A if you have not declared a major)	Q3=OPEN ENDED Q3A.

<p>4. Do you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commute • Live on campus 	<p>Q4 1=commute 2=live on campus</p>
<p>5. Do you grow up in a</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural area • Suburban area • Urban area 	<p>Q5 1=Rural 2=suburban 3=urban</p>
<p>6. Did you vote in the 2008 presidential election?</p> <p>Yes No Not eligible</p>	<p>Q6 1=YES 2=NO 3=NOT ELIGIBLE</p>
<p>7. Did you vote in the 2010 Congressional/Senate Elections?</p> <p>Yes No Not eligible</p>	<p>Q7 1=YES 2=NO 3=NOT ELIGIBLE</p>
<p>8. Did you vote in the 2010 New York State Assembly/Senate Elections?</p> <p>Yes No Not eligible</p>	<p>Q8 1=YES 2=NO 3=NOT ELIGIBLE</p>
<p>9. Have you ever voted for student representatives for the University at Albany Student Association while a student here?</p> <p>Yes No</p>	<p>Q9 1=YES 2=NO 3=NOT ELIGIBLE</p>
<p>10. Are you part of any political organizations on or off campus? Q10. OPEN ENDED</p>	
<p>Q11. A-I</p> <p>1=YES (WITHIN THE PAST YEAR)</p> <p>2=YES (EVER)</p> <p>3=NO</p> <p>11. For each of the following, please tell me whether you have done an activity or not</p>	

	Yes (within the past year)	Yes (ever)	No (never)
(a) Contacted a government official at any level of government to express your opinion	[]	[]	[]
(b) Worked for a political party or Candidate	[]	[]	[]
(c) Contributed money for a political Campaign	[]	[]	[]
(d) Attended a political meeting, rally, or speech	[]	[]	[]
(e) Displayed a political button, sticker, sign	[]	[]	[]
(f) Signed an e-mail or written petition about a political issue.	[]	[]	[]
(g) Worked or volunteered on a community project	[]	[]	[]
(h) worked or volunteered for non political groups such as hobby club or student associate group	[]	[]	[]
(i) raise money for a charity or ran/bike for a charity	[]	[]	[]
(j) try to persuaded others to vote in an Election	[]	[]	[]
(k) brought certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons	[]	[]	[]
12. Do you consider yourself to be ___Very Liberal ___Liberal ___ Moderate ___Conservative ___Very Conservative ___ Undecided	Q12 1=VERY LIBERAL 2=LIBERAL 3=MODERATE 4=CONSERVATIVE 5=VERY CONSERVATIVE		

		6=UNDECIDED	
<p>13. I self identify as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White • Black/African-American/non-Hispanic • Mexican • Puerto Rican • Cuban • Other Hispanic:_____ • American Indian or Alaskan Native • Asian Indian • Chinese • Filipino • Japanese • Korean • Vietnamese • Other Asian:_____ • Native Hawaiian • Guantomen or Chamorro • Samaon • Other Pacific Islander:_ 		<p>Q13 (CATEGORIZED RESPONES)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White
		<p>1=WHITE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black/African-American/non-Hispanic
		<p>2=BLACK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexican • Puerto Rican • Cuban • Other Hispanic
		<p>3=HISPANIC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Indian or Alaskan Native • Asian Indian • Chinese • Filipino • Japanese • Korean • Vietnamese • Other Asian:_____ • Native Hawaiian • Guantomen or Chamorro • Samaon • Other Pacific Islander:_____
<p>14. Do you read the newspaper?</p> <p>Yes No</p>	<p>Q14 1=YES 2=NO</p>	<p>If YES how often?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily • Weekly • Monthly 	<p>Q14Y 1=DAILY 2=WEEKLY 3=MONTHLY</p>
<p>15. Do you watch televised news programs? (Such as but not limited to CNN, channel X local news, etc.)</p> <p>Yes No</p>	<p>Q.15 1=YES 2=NO</p>	<p>If YES how often?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily • Weekly • Monthly 	<p>Q15Y 1=DAILY 2=WEEKLY 3=MONTHLY</p>

<p>16. Where do you get <u>MOST</u> of your information about current events?</p> <p>Q16 OPEN ENDED</p>		
<p>17. List all social networking sites and/or micro-blogging sites that you visit/have accounts with, if you visit any?</p> <p>Q17 OPEN ENDED</p>		
<p>18. Of those all the sites that you visit/have an account with, which one do you prefer and why?</p> <p>Q18 OPEN ENDED</p>		
<p>19. Have you ever had a Twitter/Twitter account?</p> <p>Yes No</p>	<p>Q.19 1=YES 2=NO</p>	<p>If you answered No, DO NOT fill out the rest of the survey.</p>
<p>• Why did create one? Was there any event in particular that prompted you to create a Twitter account?</p> <p>Q19A OPEN ENDED</p>		
<p>20. Do you currently have a Twitter account?</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>For how long have you had this account?</p> <p>Q20Y</p>	<p>Q.20 1=YES 2=NO</p>	<p>If No ONLY answer the following questions</p> <p>1. Why did you deactivate you Twitter account?</p> <p>Q21N1 OPEN ENDED</p> <p>2. For how long was your account active?</p>

<p>1=<1 YEAR 2=1<2YEARS 3=2+ YEASRS</p> <p>CATEGORIZED RESPONES</p>		<p>Q20N2 OPEN ENDED</p>	
<p>21. How often do you use Twitter?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily • Weekly • Monthly • Rarely • Never 	<p>Q21 1=DAILY 2=WEEKLY 3=MONTHLY 4=RARELY 5=NEVER</p>	<p>IF DAILY, how many times a day</p> <p>1-2 times</p> <p>3-5 times</p> <p>5> times</p>	<p>Q21D 1=1-2 TIMES 2=3-5 TIMES 3=5> TIMES</p>
<p>22. How do connect to your Twitter account? Circle all that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer • Phone • Other mobile devices <p>Which one do you use the most to connect to Twitter? Q. 22A OPEN ENDED</p> <p>Why? Q22B OPEN ENDED</p>		<p>Q22. 1=IF CIRCLED ONE OF THE CHOICED 2= IF CIRCLED TWO OF THE CHOICES 3= IF CIRCLE ALL THREE</p>	
<p>23. Who do you follow? (check all that apply and circle the group that you follow the most) You may list others that are not mentioned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends _____ • Celebrities _____ • Politicians _____ • Family _____ • News outlets _____ • Co-workers _____ • Others _____ 		<p>Q23 1= CHECKED ONE 2= CHECKED TWO 3=CHECKED THREE 4=CHECKED FOUR 5=CHECKED FIVE 6=CHECKED SIX 7=CHECKED SEVEN</p> <p>Q23 1=FOLLOWS 2= DOES NOT FOLLOW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Friends B. Celebrities C. Politicians D. Family E. News outlets F. Co-workers 	

		G. Others					
24. Of those mentioned below, with whom do you have conversations (post a status, while using @ to direct it towards a particular follower)?							
Q24 a-g	CODE	1	2	3	4	5	
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never	
	A	Friends	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	B	Celebrities	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	C	Politicians	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	D	Family	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	E	News outlets	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	F	Co-workers	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	G	Others_____	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
25. Of the people you follow whose tweets do you read?							
Q25 a-g	CODE	1	2	3	4	5	
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never	
	A	Friends	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	B	Celebrities	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	C	Politicians	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	D	Family	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	E	News outlets	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	F	Co-workers	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
	G	Other _____	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
26. Do you ever tweet?/Do you ever post information on Twitter? Yes No		Q.26 1=YES 2=NO	If yes, how often to you tweet? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple times a day • Once a day • Weekly • Monthly • Rarely • Never 		Q26A 1=MULITPLE TIMES A DAY 2=ONCE A DAY 3=WEEKLY 4=MONTHLY 5=RARELY 6=NEVER		
Q27	27. I Tweet about						

a-g	CODE	1 Daily	2 Weekly	3 Monthly	4 Rarely	5 Never
A	School	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B	Friends	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
C	Celebrities	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
D	Current event	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
E	Family	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
F	Quotes	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
G	News Stories	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
H	Work	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
I	Politics	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
J	Music	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
K	Jokes	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

<p>28. Do you ever retweet? Yes No</p>	<p>Q.28 1=YES 2=NO</p>
<p>29. . How often do you retweet political tweets? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very often • Sometimes • Never </p>	<p>Q.29 1=VERY OFTEN 2=SOMETIMES 3=NEVER</p>

Appendix B: Voting Pattern of SUNY Albany Students

Voting

*****0=did not answer; 1=yes; 2=no; 3=ineligible**

Voting the in the 2008 presidential election (q.6)

Q6	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	1	0.51	0.51
1	49	24.75	25.25
2	74	37.37	62.63
3	74	37.37	100.00
Total	198	100.00	

Voting the in the 2010 Congressional Elections (q7)

Q7	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	1	0.51	0.51
1	34	17.17	17.68
2	151	76.26	93.94
3	12	6.06	100.00
Total	198	100.00	

Voting in the 2010 New State elections (q8)

Q8	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	1	0.51	0.51
1	32	16.16	16.67
2	154	77.78	94.44
3	11	5.56	100.00
Total	198	100.00	

Voting in the any Student Association election (q9)

Q9	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
1	112	56.57	56.57
2	86	43.43	100.00
Total	198	100.00	

Appendix C: PE/CE Scores and Retweeting Data

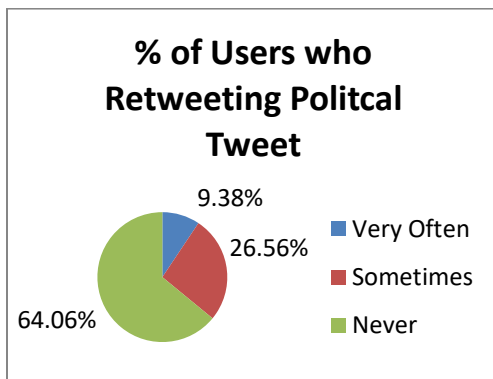
***0=did not answer; 1=yes; 2=no;

Political Engagement (PE) scores

Q11PE	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
1	61	30.81	30.81
2	137	69.19	100.00
Total	198	100.00	

Civic Engagement (CE) Scores

Q11CE	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	3	1.52	1.52
1	153	77.27	78.79
2	42	21.21	100.00
Total	198	100.00	



Ashleigh Morpeau
Spring 2011

Thesis Advisor: Dr. David Rousseau
Senior Thesis