

8-2016

LatinoTwitter: Discourses of Latino civic engagement in social media

Alison N. Novak

Rowan University, novak@rowan.edu

Kristine C. Johnson

Rowan University, johnsonkr@rowan.edu

Manuel Pontes

Rowan University, pontes@rowan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/ccca_facpub



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Novak, Alison N.; Johnson, Kristine C.; and Pontes, Manuel, "LatinoTwitter: Discourses of Latino civic engagement in social media" (2016). *College of Communication & Creative Arts Faculty Scholarship*. 2.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/ccca_facpub/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Communication & Creative Arts at Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Communication & Creative Arts Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact jiras@rowan.edu, rdw@rowan.edu.

LatinoTwitter: Discourses of Latino civic engagement in social media

By Alison N. Novak, Kristine Johnson, and Manuel Pontes

Introduction

In March 2016, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz stood by a podium in front of a rowdy crowd of young voters in Houston Texas, and proclaimed his primary victory a result of Hispanic voters and their social media habits (Abrams, 2016). He described the state's changing demographic makeup, arguing that in 2016, the only vote that mattered belonged to Hispanics (Hafner, 2016). Later, his campaign manager took Cruz's Hispanic argument further by telling reporters he intended to "woo the group" through social media, and in particular Twitter (Hafner, 2016).

While anecdotally, many politicians have turned to Twitter to engage various demographic groups, few have studied Hispanic use of Twitter and how it affects civic and political engagement. Twitter's introduction in 2006 and its growth to become an indomitable force in social media has made it an important platform for communication. Despite the multitude of research on the topic, few studies have empirically or descriptively looked beyond broad Twitter use to examine specific population (such as Latinos) relationships with the platform.

This study attempts to answer the call for more in-depth research that looks at Latino use of Twitter. Herein, the paper presents a discourse analysis to more fully examine Latino use of Twitter. An analysis of Twitter users who post using the hashtag, "#LatinoTwitter," provides insight into the ways users view the digital space as a platform for civic communication and discussion [1].



Latinos and the Internet

Research indicates fewer Hispanic households have access to the Internet when compared to Caucasians and Asian Americans. This gap is most evident in terms of those who reside in homes where Spanish is the only spoken language, as these individuals are the least likely to own a computer device when compared to bilingual-speaking households (File and Ryan, 2014; Perren and Duggan, 2015). This indicates an association between income and educational level, which leaves those with fewer means technologically behind their Hispanic counterparts (Lopez, *et al.*, 2013). More than 90 percent of those with at least some college education go online; this is greatly different when compared to those who never finished high school, as only 58 percent of these individuals use the Internet. Age is also connected to varying levels of Internet activity. Among bilingual households, one-third of individuals over the age of 65 go online. Alternately, close to 90 percent of those between the ages of 18–39 use the Internet (Lopez, *et al.*, 2013).

Despite these findings, some suggest the gap in online activity is closing in relation to the use of social media sites and digital mobile phones (Carrasquillo, 2013). Latino ownership of mobile phones has surpassed the number of Caucasians who own these devices. Also, Latinos are spending more time on social media than any other demographic group in the United States (Statistica, 2014; eMarketer, 2015).

About 80 percent of Latino adults in the U.S. use social media, and among those who do use it, most tend to be young, educated, and affluent (Lopez, *et al.*, 2013). This group is a highly coveted consumer segment (Nielsen, 2015) who exhibit vital characteristics including early adoption and brand engagement (Burgos, 2016). They are viewed as those who are leading the way people use social media and digital devices. They are active on social sites including Facebook and Twitter and are described as yearning for cultural identification and personal connection (Llopis, 2014; Lopez, *et al.*, 2013; Nielsen, 2015). Aside from a consumer perspective, this active social media segment is also known to use social networking as means for strengthening both their economic and political presence on the Internet (Lopez, *et al.*, 2013).

Latinos and voting

Hispanics may be embracing newer technologies, but many are concerned they are failing to show up to the polls in the United States (Krogstad, *et al.*, 2016). There are two reasons for this: younger Latinos are not voting, and many Hispanics are not eligible to vote (Cohn, 2014; Krogstad, *et al.*, 2016). This was apparent in the 2014 midterm elections where the number of Latinos who did not vote exceeded the number of Latinos who did vote by almost three-to-one (Krogstad, *et al.*, 2016). The inconsistency with size versus action is noted by political scientist, Bernard Fraga who states, "They should have even greater voting strength than they do. They should be even more of a force in politics. But a lot of them aren't turning out to vote." [2]

Digital political engagement

Although social media use has grown dramatically in the past 10 years, scholars continue to debate the merits of social engagement, civics, and political practices enacted through these systems (Kerwin, 2010; Hill and Hayes, 2015). The merits of digital participation are somewhat controversial, as the effect and depth of this form of engagement are still inconclusively tied to political activism, public dialogue and debate, and social change (Kien, 2013).

The challenge in conceptualizing online participation in political issues results from questions of political affect and change (Kerwin, 2010). Traditional engagement scholarship argues political influence and social change is strongest when citizens work together in a physical space. This involves volunteering, canvassing, and voting. However, the digital context of new forms of political participation challenges these traditionally physical forms of engagement. Does liking or retweeting a politicized Facebook or Twitter post elicit the same social change as the previously mentioned traditional forms of engagement? Is debating other users on social media similar to discussing issues with other citizens in a physical space? In short, how can we conceptualize and understand the new forms of engagement that are exhibited in social media?

Vidali (2010) identified practices of active disengagement as a possible form of digital political participation and civic engagement. Rather than use the loaded language of slacktivism, a term that represents the ineffectiveness of digital participation, Vidali proposed seeing digital civics as a new form of traditional practices (Allen, *et al.*, 2014). Active disengagement as a framework identifies digital behaviors as a possible alternative to traditional civic participation. This is particularly useful for groups of citizens who previously felt left out from traditional forms of political engagement (such as voting, canvassing, and volunteering). The digital space allows these groups to engage in political issues and avoid the physical spaces where they feel unwelcomed.

Eliasoph's (1998) seminal work, *Avoiding Politics*, contended that minority groups did not stay out of political issues because of disinterest or laziness, but rather because the structure of the political process left them out. For example, after centuries of not being allowed to vote, African Americans tended to avoid traditional forms of political engagement because they still felt unwelcomed by the established channels (*i.e.*, political parties, civic associations, and political candidates) (Herrnson, *et al.*, 2007). Whether this was the result of formal or informal channel decisions, African Americans tended to avoid participating (outside of voting) in political issues (Stern and Rookey, 2013).

However, more recent research suggests social media has helped these minority groups find their own channels of political engagement (Baber, 2003). Twitter, in particular, has served as a platform for minority groups to discuss, debate, and form political issues, strategies, and campaigns (Labella, 2012). The majority of research has examined how African Americans have used the digital space to engage in civic issues such as racial representation, public policy, and police violence. Other groups, such as Hispanic Americans, similarly use the platform (Kahne and Middaugh, 2012). Like African Americans, Hispanic Americans have reported feeling left out of traditional political engagement channels, thus, perhaps motivating their turn to digital media (Kahne and Middaugh, 2012). Bekafigo and McBride (2013) note that Hispanics used Twitter to discuss gubernatorial races. This is important considering the reluctance of the group to traditionally engage

through voting or campaigning in gubernatorial races. Thus, Twitter may allow minority groups to participate more in politics, particularly when they feel left out of the traditional channels.

Park (2013) argues that Twitter's effect on political engagement is somewhat counter-intuitive. Previously, scholars thought people who were traditionally politically engaged would be more likely to engage online. However, in reality, Twitter may be the mechanism that causes more engagement off-line. Twitter is a type of motivator and gateway to traditional political engagement. Groups who start on Twitter often transfer to physical spaces and traditional practices (Wilson, 2011). Is it possible Hispanic Americans engagement on Twitter may lead to traditional engagement later on? This was the case with African American use of Twitter, also known as Black Twitter. Early Twitter conversations in 2012 about the position and status of African Americans in the wake of racialized police brutality led to the "Black Lives Matter" campaign. Discussion on digital networks found a new life in physical political protests in places like Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015). Similarly, Jackson and Foucault Welles (2015) found that African Americans discussing the New York Police Department on Twitter led to physical petitions circulating for stronger police regulation and monitoring. In effect, digital conversations on Twitter turn into physical traditional political engagement for groups who previously felt left out of politics (Ardoin, 2013).

Importantly, the majority of scholarship on this transition from Twitter to physical traditional engagement has occurred by looking at Twitter content after the transition has taken place. For example, researchers collected Twitter data containing "#blacklivesmatter" after the Ferguson, Missouri protests. While this allowed researchers to connect the physical engagement to an earlier digital conversation and topic, recent scholars have questioned this approach for de-contextualizing the tweets (Arias, *et al.*, 2013; Gayo-Avello, 2013). Arias, *et al.* (2013) argue that knowing the physical outcome of tweets, like the #blacklivesmatter protests, plausibly changes researcher's interpretation of data. Instead, they recommend looking at trending topics and hashtags within these minority communities sooner, even before they turn into physical events (Arias, *et al.*, 2013). Other scholars have suggested more inquiry into the dialogue and discourses of Hispanic users on Twitter (Mercado-Martinez and Urias-Vázquez, 2014). It is clear that the conversations and discourses of minority users on Twitter can be powerful instruments of political engagement, thus more scholarship on Hispanics in this social media is necessary.

This paper attempts to build upon the recommendations of Arias, *et al.* (2013), and Mercado-Martinez and Urias-Vázquez (2014) by looking at a trending hashtag within the Hispanic user community. Specifically, it looks at the "#LatinoTwitter" hashtag, and all posts that used this hashtag between 1 March 2014 and 1 March 2016. Similar to the popular #BlackTwitter hashtag that eventually lead (amongst other factors) to protests and demonstrations against police brutality, #LatinoTwitter grew popular amongst Hispanic users. Although the #LatinoTwitter hashtag has not been tied to any physical protest movements yet, its tangential relationship and similarity to #BlackTwitter, makes it a possible source and cause for future political engagement.



Latino Twitter discourses

To analyze how Hispanic users discuss political issues, all posts using the #LatinoTwitter hashtag were collected for a two-year period (1 March 2014–1 March 2016). While the hashtag was used before and after these dates, this two-year period reflects the time when the hashtag was used the most. In total, the hashtag was used 31,596 times during these two years. The tweets were collected using an archival tool that mines the platform based on search criteria, in this case #LatinoTwitter [3]. This hashtag was selected because it was identified as the most popular hashtag for Hispanic users (Headline News, 2015) during this two-year period.

A discourse analysis method of the Twitter data allows researchers to look at what is being said on this platform. To analyze the set of tweets, Gee's (2011) discourse analysis methods were used. This analysis stresses that scholars should read through a data set, then identify patterns of phrases, terms of reference, topics, or rhetorical strategies, and then synthesize results. To enact this method, researchers individually coded the tweets, and then met to narrow down their findings and agree upon four discourses. In total, four discourses were identified and are described below. For reliability purposes, examples of tweets from each discourse are included.

Discourse one: Racial positionality

Many of the posts using the #LatinoTwitter hashtag related to positionality, defining the contemporary place of Latino users. Users commented on their own cultural heritage and how they identified within the group. For example, a tweet which was favorited 1,435 times reads “Latino and Proud, Latino and Loud #LatinoTwitter” [4]. Tweets like this were common, as they affirmed the position of the group and culture, as well as identified specific characteristics which the group and users were proud of. These physical characteristics included volume, the quality of their hair (*i.e.*, “Latina hair, don’t care #LatinoTwitter”), and the tan color of skin (*i.e.*, “If you a true Latina, you don’t have to sit in the sun to tan, the sun finds you #LatinoTwitter”). Pride went beyond physical attributes and also discussed the more internal cultural norms and values associated with Latinos. For example, a popular post with 2,500 favorites reads: “#LatinoTwitter — Hispanics are all about the family, let me hear you if you agree! :)).” This type of description of the physical and cultural attributes that made up the Latino user group on Twitter helped shape the contemporary definition and identity of the community. Through favoring posts that particularly summarized the Latino cultural experience, users defined the shape and scope of their culture, digital group, and community.

However, positioning the group went beyond listing characteristics of the culture. It also included positing their heritage against other ethnic and racial groups. In this sense, the group was not only defining itself by its attributes, but also defining itself by what it was not. For example, one user wrote, “Even less Latinos have won let alone been nominated for an Oscar. I’m proud #LatinoTwitter isn’t up in arms about it. Ridiculous.” Here, the user criticizes #BlackTwitter’s outrage that African American actors were left out of the annual Academy Award nominations. The #LatinoTwitter community identified itself in this case by reacting differently to similar circumstances. This type of positionality allow users to define the normal behaviors and actions of their members. Comments such as this allow the group to suggest that members of #LatinoTwitter should not engage in the “ridiculous” protest of the Academy Awards, despite their being plausible impetus. The “ridiculous” statement at the end alludes members of #LatinoTwitter who were “up in arms” would be cast as outsiders to the community and group.

However, there were issues, particularly regarding the group’s position within white culture, that warranted protest and criticism within the community. For example, “#LatinoTwitter, how come we don’t talk about how lowly white ppl see us? Why are we seen as gardeners before we’re seen as a THINKING ppl!?!?” Tweets like this one particularly emphasized the roles that Latinos were cast in society and mass media. While critiquing the Academy Award nomination process was not acceptable to the group, criticizing a stereotype was. Members of #LatinoTwitter listed a myriad of stereotypes and conventional mass media roles that they rejected for their negative portrayal of Latinos. These included gardeners/the help, sexually promiscuity (*i.e.*, “Why latinas gotta be cast as sluts and hores? #LatinoTwitter”), and unemployment (*i.e.*, “#LatinoTwitter, you ever notice that we’re always unemployed or lazy bums on tv?”). These largely negative stereotypes were attributed to white members of the mass media who were in charge of writing or producing popular television, films, and digital content.

Beyond the criticism of the roles that Latinos played in mass media, there was also criticism of the depth and meaning of these performances and representations. For example, “#LatinoTwitter Why is it ‘progressive’ to show a janitor as smart but we can’t even show LATINOS as that? We never see Latinos portraying Drs?” The term progressive routinely appeared throughout the data set, as members of the digital group criticized any mention that more positive representations of the group were somehow modern or contemporary. The members rejected the notion that this was somehow “progressive” and instead insisted the reflection that this was somehow better, reinforced the negative position of the group in media. In the earlier tweet, the writer criticizes that the janitor (on ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*) in question is portrayed as smart, and instead questions why he still has to be a janitor. Rather than accepting the change of the janitor’s intelligence as progressive, the user resists the portrayal and wonders why that character still holds an inferior or more stereotypical position.

Importantly, the discussion of mass media representations may help shed light on why the group turned to Twitter in the first place. If, as other scholars have argued, Twitter serves as a digital media platform for user groups to feel safer within, it is likely the negativity surrounding Latinos in the mass media contributed to the popularity of some digital platforms. Through the positioning tweets, the group has the ability to

define itself, rather than rely upon others who traditionally have control over television and other media. On Twitter, the group has the ability to control its own definitions and representation.

Discourse two: Social and civic purposes

Beyond criticism, #LatinoTwitter users turned their frustrations into calls for action and actualized political protest. Twitter space allowed users to collectively discuss their anger and frustration with things like the janitor on *Grey's Anatomy*, as well as much larger and more politically focused issues. For example, the group particularly turned their attention to the messaging and political maneuvering of GOP Presidential candidate Donald Trump. After a speech where Trump called Mexican immigrants rapists and drug dealers, members of #LatinoTwitter angrily vented and called for collective action. For example, "@UniNoticias #jeb2016 Singer Marc Anthony brings house down with 'I'm proud to be #LatinoTwitter and f*ck #Trump <http://www.rawstory.com/2016/02/watch-singer-marc-anthony-brings-house-down-with-im-proud-to-be-latino-and-fck-donald-trump/#.VrexTXIoxOA.twitter> ..." Tweets that criticized Trump's point of view, legislative aims, and even physical appearance were common. Importantly, these users frequently aligned themselves with other users, such as Marc Anthony who spoke out against Trump's bashing of Mexican immigrants. In doing so, users also offered another candidate, one who they felt more fairly depicted and represented the group. While there was no consensus, they identified Anthony's endorsement of Jeb Bush as an alternative Republican nominee.

Other tweets used satire and humor to criticize Trump and promote alternatives. For example, "Spot on — the Hispanic guy stole something. Trump's new memoir @seanmdav #Trump2016 #LatinosForBernie #latinotwitter." In this case, the user parodies potential titles of Trump's new book if a Hispanic candidate won the nomination. In addition, this user offers the #LatinosForBernie hashtag to demonstrate who he favors instead. Within all of these tweets, particularly those centered on the 2016 Presidential campaign, users identified their ethnic identity as fundamentally tied to their vote and political affiliation. The #LatinosForBernie hashtag equates the vote for Senator Bernie Sanders to a result of ethnic and cultural identity. Rather than elaborating on the nuances or rationale of their vote (for or against candidates), these users simply provide their ethnicity as an explanation. While it's likely a number of factors influenced this decision, on Twitter, the explanation is reduced to ethnic identity. This may be more of a reflection on the limited characters in a tweet than an actual reflection on voting rationale, but more research on this topic is necessary before any conclusion could be drawn.

Calls for political and civic action were also frequent, as users asked other members of the community to engage in the political process. One tweet favored 5,000 times reads: "If #BlackTwitter and #LatinoTwitter voted in the south heavy w/ #MidtermVote as they do a President? Things would be diff in USA #GoDoIt #FeelTheBern." Here, the user asks followers and other members of the community to vote in both the midterm and Presidential elections to enact a change. Further, it implies their vote will be for Bernie Sanders by using his official Twitter hashtag. Importantly, there were many mentions of #BlackTwitter as being a type of role model for political or civic action. Unlike in the positionality discourse, here #BlackTwitter's political actions were aspirational to the #LatinoTwitter community. The two groups, although positioned as opposites, were now described as holding similar goals. The effects of #BlackTwitter's political protest, particularly on issues such as police violence were viewed as something #LatinoTwitter should try to mirror. For example, "#LatinoTwitter #latinolivesmatter #BlackLivesMatter #policenews #cnn Stop ignoring the police killings of #Latinos <http://alj.am/3h6r>." Tweets like this one seem to speak on behalf of the #LatinoTwitter community and ask CNN to focus their coverage on Latino police violence (as they did earlier with Black police violence). The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, popularized during periods of physical protests and demonstrations after African American youth were killed by police officers, was re-used within the #LatinoTwitter community to attempt to rally the group behind a similar cause.

Many of these posts — calling for the community to protest or act — were followed by shortened links providing news coverage of sensitive topics. For example, the link provided in this tweet, "No compassion: This amazing #TedCruz video proves that 'compassionate conservatism' is truly dead <http://buff.ly/1JxvFCP> #LatinoTwitter," brings readers to a Web site filled with Senator Ted Cruz videos discussing repealing the Dream Act and kicking out illegal immigrants. These links served as supporting evidence and motivation for readers to join or align with the goals of the group. This type of information sharing appears throughout the third discourse.

Discourse three: Information sharing

The #LatinoTwitter hashtag served as a space for users to share news articles, research studies, and videos that gave further insight into the contemporary experience of Latinos in America. For example, in the earlier Senator Cruz tweet, the user provided a video link that archived the candidate's negative comments concerning Latinos. While this was clearly done to encourage alternative voting behavior, other links provided when using the hashtag were meant to circulate information. One tweet read: "#LatinoTwitter RT @wsj: The thorny economics of illegal immigration <http://on.wsj.com/1RkGCK7>." The goal of this post was to share a *Wall Street Journal* story that described complications of illegal immigration to the American economy. Unlike the earlier use of the #LatinoTwitter hashtag, this was not a loaded tweet that asked the community to act or react in some way. Instead, the goal was to simply circulate and share the information and article within the #LatinoTwitter community. This type of information sharing seemingly fulfilled Twitter's original intention, which was to provide a digital space for users to share information, news, and ideas with each other. While today Twitter is well known as a community action base, this type of sharing behavior seemingly was a part of its original design.

Typically, information shared using the #LatinoTwitter hashtag was about immigration, Presidential candidates, and religion. For example, "Latino #Muslims are part of US religious landscape @AJENews [#Islam #religion #latinotwitter](http://aje.io/zz5s)," describes the group's religious affiliation and practices. Other tweets, such as "Pew: 12 Million Latino Millennials Will Be Eligible to Vote in 2016 <http://latinousa.org/2016/01/19/pew-latino-millennials-are-44-of-countrys-27-3-million-latino-eligible-voters/> ... via @LatinoUSA @VotoLatino #LatinoTwitter," focused on the electoral outcomes of Latinos.

Many of these tweets originated from news Web sites rather than the organic reactions of users. An individual could click the Twitter icon on a news Web site and a pop-up window would appear with a tweet already written out. If this is the case, it is even more interesting that the #LatinoTwitter hashtag is used, considering this would mean it was a cognitive decision by the journalist to target this community with a given article. While it is unclear how many of these tweets originated in this manner, it does reflect the possibility of other communities, such as journalists, attempting to join or engage with the #LatinoTwitter community. In some ways, this authenticates or legitimizes the group as a powerful digital community because of its formal recognition by the mass media. Alternatively, this journalist behavior invokes the tenuous relationship between #LatinoTwitter and the mass media. The group was largely critical of traditional media in their positioning discourse, so future work will need to examine how they respond to attempts by the media to reach them through information sharing.

Discourse four: Promotion

Finally, in a similar style to information sharing, promotive tweets provided information about a product, person, or brand that the #LatinoTwitter should or could support. For example, "@JenniferLopez Will Add Las Vegas Residency to Her Resume on January 20! #Selena #jlo #latinotwitter <http://www.mstarz.com/articles/101607/20160118/ready-jennifer-lopez-will-add-las-vegas-residency-resume-january-20.htm> ..." informed the community about popular Latina superstar, Jennifer Lopez's new Las Vegas residency. The corresponding news story also provided a link for fans to purchase tickets and merchandise. Tweets like this, particularly ones that depicted famous Latinos and upcoming events, were common in the data set. While not directly advertisements, they served as a way to communicate promotional information. Other celebrities included Marc Anthony, Gina Rodriguez, and Eva Mendes. Most of these tweets, while posted from user accounts, probably originated from other Web sites, such as the CW's for Gina Rodriguez and E! For Eva Mendes (with a similar pop up box as the information sharing discourse).

Celebrities themselves also used the #LatinoTwitter hashtag to communicate with the community and group. Big Pun, a Bronx, NY Rapper, tweeted one of his lyrics on the day of his album release: "LATINS GOING PLATINUM WAS DISTANT TO COME" — Big Pun #LatinoTwitter #Latinoamerica #BigPun." This type of promotion, of personal achievements, creative work, and brands attempted to use the #LatinoTwitter

community as a type of fan base, where the fans of Big Pun (and others) would overlap with members of the #LatinoTwitter community. It is difficult to say if Big Pun was a member of the #LatinoTwitter community before his use of it in this tweet (his prior tweets did not use the hashtag), but his attempt to reach them and simultaneously gain a digital fan base oriented itself around the digital community.

This discourse seemingly concerned people, celebrities, or musicians rather than products or companies. For example, tweets mostly concerned people like Jennifer Lopez rather than brands like Maybelline (with a large customer demographic of Latinas). The lack of goods or companies using this hashtag is considerable, especially considering the representation of journalists, celebrities, and information sources. While it is impossible to tell why this market category was missing in the #LatinoTwitter community, its absence is notable.



Implications of Latino Twitter use

In evaluating the popular #LatinoTwitter discourses on Twitter, patterns of engagement and practice within the digital platform were recognized and analyzed. The tweets included in the analysis demonstrated the myriad of ways that members of the Latino community use the online platform to discursively describe and identify their culture, political interests, and promotive products.

Importantly, these discourses supported earlier research arguments that Latinos may turn to digital platforms in order to enact change or efficacy within the political system. Within this data set were many examples of Latino frustrations with the current political system, their ability to contribute to traditional political channels, and the rhetoric of Presidential candidates. Through tweets of anger and frustration, users turned to Twitter to develop their own form of participation and even strategic campaigns. Twitter was an avenue of civic engagement for a group that vocally expressed their inability to participate in a traditional manner.

In addition, the #LatinoTwitter hashtag was used to engage with other digital campaigns and groups. The hashtag was used to provide parity between other ethnic groups who digitally campaigned for social change. The ongoing tweets about how #LatinoTwitter was different than #BlackTwitter reflected how the group felt that they were different than other communities. This may be a type of gatekeeping or community defining, but future research will need to more fully examine this practice.

Finally, the group's acceptance and encouragement of the "promotion" discourse was particularly interesting. Although the group was primarily dedicated to politics (including identity politics), their acceptance of promotion, such as a rapper sharing his new album, seemed to reaffirm that rather than based in traditional electoral politics, this group accepted a fuller definition of "the political" to include social, cultural, media, and personal issues. Although much more research is necessary on this topic, this perhaps gives hope that this community will persist even after the current election cycle.

Although this research provided information into the use of the #LatinoTwitter hashtag, there are limitations about the findings implications and generalizations. For example, it is impossible (from a research tool development perspective) to ascertain the ethnicity of each participant. Not all people using the #LatinoTwitter hashtag may not be actually Latinos, or identify as Latino. Other populations, including marketers may use the hashtag to interact with the group. Despite this limitation, the popularity of the hashtag still warrants its investigation, in addition to its relationship with the community. Second, although the data collection tool used in this study has been tested for its reliability and the completeness of its data set (which is 96.5 percent), there does exist a possibility that there were tweets not included in this collection. Future work may want to collect data with another Twitter tool to determine the completeness of this set and the findings identified within.

Other future work should investigate other hashtags popular with the Twitter community. #LatinoTwitter (because of its proximity to other popular racialized hashtags, such as #BlackTwitter) made sense as a starting point for this analysis. However, studying #LatinaTwitter may help identify gendered discourses, or #LatinoKids may help identify age as a factor within usage. Beyond looking for gender and age within Latino Twitter users, studies may also want to investigate other frameworks of engagement including slacktivism,

participatory culture, or remediated communities. These may help expand our current understanding of Latino use of Twitter and other social media platforms.

As a part of a much longer and more detailed study examining the Hispanic community and their use of Twitter, this discourse analysis provides the beginning evidence of how the digital platform may contextualize and facilitate online communication and campaigns. While more research needs to be completed to gain more detailed understanding about each of these discourses, preliminary results demonstrate the growing popularity of the platform and its political implications for scholars. 

About the authors

Alison Novak is Assistant Professor in Public Relations & Advertising at Rowan University. Her work explores the intersections of youth, digital media, and politics. She is the author of *Media, millennials, and politics: The coming of age of the next political generation* (Lexington Books, 2016) and co-editor of *Defining identity and the changing scope of culture in the digital age* (IGI Global, 2016). She is a graduate of the Communication, Culture, and Media doctoral program at Drexel University.
E-mail: novak [at] rowan [dot] edu

Kristine Johnson is Assistant Professor in Public Relations & Advertising at Rowan University. Her research interests include consumer use of digital media, digital media marketing, and traditional media use of new technologies. She has presented her research at multiple conferences and her work has appeared in the *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* and the *Journal of Applied Marketing Theory*, among others. She teaches advertising and marketing-related courses at Rowan University.
E-mail: johnsonkr [at] rowan [dot] edu

Manuel Pontes is Professor in the Rohrer College of Business at Rowan University. He joined the marketing faculty at Rowan in 2000 to teach courses in the areas of research methods, services marketing, retailing, and marketing channels. His primary research interests are distance education in higher education (use of NPSAS 2008, NPSAS 2004, and BPS 2004–09) and the relationship between health insurance, and family income on health care consumption (MEPS, NHIS, and BRFSS). His methodological interests are in the analysis of data collected from complex survey designs and the use of R for data analyses and data visualization
E-mail: pontes [at] rowan [dot] edu

Notes

[1.](#) While the researchers recognize the discursive and cultural autonomy of the Hispanic and Latino communities, much of the previous research uses these terms interchangeably. As a result, literature and findings in this study reflect the terminology of each cited scholarship or author, thus the two terms are used intermittently throughout.

[2.](#) Cusido, 2016, paragraph 9.

[3.](#) The tool used for this project is currently under review for a patent, and thus is not specifically identified. The tool has been used in other published work and has a reliability rate of 96.5 percent). Once the tool has been awarded the patent, its name and specific identifying information will be included.

[4.](#) All tweets were anonymized to protect the users' identities. They were not edited for grammar, spelling, or typos.

References

Abigail Abrams, 2016. "What's Ted Cruz's religion? Texas senator appeals to religious voters like Mormons in Utah to compete against Trump," *International Business Times* (23 March),

at <http://www.ibtimes.com/what-ted-cruzs-religion-texas-senator-appeals-religious-voters-mormons-utah-compete-2342199>, accessed 25 March 2016.

Danielle Allen, Moya Bailey, Niko Carpenter, Natalie Fenton, Harry Jenkins, Alexis Lothian, Jack Linchuan Qiu, Mirko Tobias Schafer, and Ramesh Srinivasan 2014. "Participations: Dialogues on the participatory promise of contemporary culture and politics. Part 3: Politics," *International Journal of Communication*, volume 8, pp. 1,129–1,151, and at <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2787/1124>, accessed 23 July 2016.

Phillip J. Ardoin, 2013. "Why don't you tweet? The congressional black caucus' social media gap," *Race, Gender & Class*, volume 20, numbers 1–2, pp. 130–140.

Marta Arias, Argimiro Arratia, and Ramon Xuriguera, 2013. "Forecasting with Twitter data," *ACM Transactions on Intelligent Systems and Technology*, volume 5, number 15, article number 8. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1145/2542182.2542190>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Zaheer Baber, 2003. "New media, new politics? The Internet and the prospects for digital democracy," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, volume 23, number 2, pp. 125–128. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/0270467603251307>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Marija Anna Bekafigo and Allan McBride, 2013. "Who tweets about politics? Political participation of Twitter users during the 2011 gubernatorial elections," *Social Science Computer Review*, volume 31, number 5, pp. 625–643. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/0894439313490405>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, 2015. "#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States," *American Ethnologist*, volume 42, number 1, pp. 4–17. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12112>, accessed 29 March 2016.

Adrian Carrasquillo, 2013. "Study: digital divide disappearing as Latinos catch up on Internet usage," *NBC News* (7 March), at <http://nbcclatino.com/2013/03/07/study-digital-divide-disappearing-as-latinos-catch-up-on-internet-usage/>, accessed 23 March 2016.

Nate Cohn, 2014. "Why Hispanics don't have a larger political voice," *New York Times* (15 June), at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/upshot/why-hispanics-dont-have-a-larger-political-voice.html>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Carmen Cusido, 2016. "The Latino vote in 2016: Here are 5 takeaways," *NBC News* (30 January), at <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latino-vote-2016-here-are-5-takeaways-n507611>, accessed 1 April 2016.

Nina Eliasoph, 1998. *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

eMarketer, 2015. "Hispanics make social a crucial part of digital lives" (28 May), at <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Hispanics-Make-Social-Crucial-Part-of-Digital-Lives/1012534>, accessed 2 May 2016.

Thom File and Camille Ryan, 2014. "Computer and Internet use in the United States: 2013," *U.S. Census Bureau* (November), at <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/2013computeruse.pdf>, accessed 3 May 2016.

Daniel Gayo-Avello, 2013. "A meta-analysis of state-of-the-art electoral prediction from Twitter data," *Social Science Computer Review*, volume 31, number 6, pp. 649–679. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/0894439313493979>, accessed 30 March 2016.

James Paul Gee, 2011. *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Third edition. New York: Routledge.

Josh Hafner, 2016. "GOP establishment to Ted Cruz: Want our help? Better apologize," *USA Today* (17 March), at <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/03/16/gop-establishment-ted-cruz-senate-mcconnell/81882282/>, accessed 23 March 2016.

Headline News, 2015. "#LatinoTwitter in 2015," at <http://www.headlines-news.com/2015/12/30/699820/latinotwitter-in-2015>, accessed 28 March 2016.

Paul S. Herrnson, Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown, and Matthew Hindman, 2007. "Campaign politics and the digital divide: Constituency characteristics, strategic considerations, and candidate Internet use in state legislative elections," *Political Research Quarterly*, volume 60, number 1, pp. 31–42. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/1065912906298527>, accessed 30 March 2016.

Myleea D. Hill and Marceline Hayes, 2015. "Do you like it on the..? A case-study of reactions to a Facebook campaign for breast cancer awareness month," *Qualitative Report*, volume 20, number 11, article number 2 pp. 1,747–1,762, and at <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss11/2>, accessed 23 July 2016.

Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, 2015. "Hijacking #myNYPD: Social media dissent and networked counterpublics," *Journal of Communication*, volume 65, number 6, pp. 932–952. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12185>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, 2012. "Digital media shapes youth participation in politics," *Phi Delta Kappan*, volume 94, number 3, pp. 52–56. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/003172171209400312>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Ann Marie Kerwin, 2010. "How to get the social-media generation behind your cause; for today's young adults, activism can be as simple as hitting 'like' on Facebook, but brands can use this 'slacktivism' to their advantage," *Advertising Age*, volume 81, number 26 (28 June), p. 8, and at <http://adage.com/article/digital/social-media-generation/144686/>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Grant Kien, 2013. "Media memes and prosumerist ethics: Notes toward a theoretical examination of memetic audience behavior," *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies*, volume 13, number 6, pp. 554–561. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/1532708613503785>, accessed 27 March 2016.

Jens Manuel Krogstad, Mark Hugo Lopez, Gustavo López, Jeffrey S. Passel, and Eileen Patten, 2016. "Looking back to 2014: Latino voter turnout rate Falls to record low," *Pew Research Center* (19 January) at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/01/19/looking-back-to-2014-latino-voter-turnout-rate-falls-to-record-low/>, accessed 3 May 2016.

Luis Izquierdo Labella, 2012. "Las redes sociales en la política española: Twitter en las elecciones de 2011 (Social networks on Spanish politics: Twitter on 2011 election campaigns)," *Estudos em Comunicação*, number 11, pp. 149–164.

Glenn Llopis, 2014. "Facebook to help brands convert 55 million U.S. Hispanics," *Forbes* (6 January), at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2014/01/06/facebook-to-help-brands-convert-55-million-u-s-hispanics/>, accessed 3 May 2016.

Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Eileen Patten, 2013. "Closing the digital divide: Latinos and technology adoption. II. Internet use," *Pew Research Center* (7 March), at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/03/07/ii-internet-use-3/>, accessed 4 May 2016.

Francisco J. Mercado-Martinez and Jorge E. Urias-Vázquez, 2014. "Enfermos renales hispanoamericanos en la época de las redes sociales virtuales: Análisis de contenido de sus publicaciones, 2010–2012 (Hispanic American kidney patients in the age of online social networks: Content analysis of postings, 2010–2012)," *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública (Pan American Journal of Public Health)*, volume 35, numbers 5–6, pp. 392–398.

Mexican American Entrepreneurs, 2016. "#LatinoTwitter in 2015," *Mexican American Entrepreneurs Network* (3 January).

Nielsen, 2015. "The multicultural edge: Rising super consumers" (18 March), at <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/the-multicultural-edge-rising-super-consumers.html>, accessed 2 May 2016.

Chang Sup Park, 2013. "Does Twitter motivate involvement in politics? Tweeting, opinion leadership, and political engagement," *Computers in Human Behavior*, volume 29, number 4, pp. 1,641–1,648. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.01.044>, accessed 29 March 2016.

Andrew Perren and Maeve Duggan, 2015. "Americans' Internet access: 2000–2015," *Pew Research Center* (26 June), at <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015/>, accessed on 2 May 2016.

Statistica, 2014. "Hispanics in the United States: Internet usage," at <http://www.statista.com/topics/1867/hispanics-in-the-united-states-internet-usage/>, accessed 3 May 2016.

Michael J. Stern and Bryan D. Rookey, 2013. "The politics of new media, space, and race: Socio-spatial analysis of the 2008 presidential election," *New Media & Society*, volume 15, number 4, pp. 519–540. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812457658>, accessed 29 March 2016.

Debra Spitulnik Vidali, 2010. "Millennial encounters with mainstream television news: Excess, void, and points of engagement," *Linguistic Anthropology*, volume 20, number 2, pp. 372–388. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1395.2010.01075.x>, accessed 23 July 2016.

Jason Wilson, 2011. "Playing with politics: Political fans and Twitter faking in post-broadcast democracy," *Convergence*, volume 17, number 4, pp. 445–461. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/1354856511414348>, accessed 23 July 2016.

Editorial history

Received 23 May 2016; accepted 22 July 2016.



This paper is free of known copyright restrictions.

LatinoTwitter: Discourses of Latino civic engagement in social media
by Alison N. Novak, Kristine Johnson, and Manuel Pontes.
First Monday, Volume 21, Number 8 - 1 August 2016
<http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/6752/5604>
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v21i8.6752>