Inside the Numbers Racket:
The 2018 Midterm Election Campaigns on Twitter

A PEORIA Project Inquiry

Dr. Michael Cornfield

November 16, 2018

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. (Social Media Monitoring Metrics) **Are There Reliable Predictive Indicators of Election Results to be discerned from Twitter?**

2. (Usage Cases) **What Twitter Strategies, Messages, and Techniques Worked and What Didn't?**

METHODOLOGY

- Comparative Analysis of Engagement Traffic on 126 Twitter Accounts of Candidates for Governor, House, and Senate in 63 close races.

- General Election Campaign Time Period: September 1 – October 31, 2018.

- Exploratory Metrics:
    1) Growth Rate in Account Followers.
    2) "Total Engagement" = Account Mentions + Post Retweets + Addressed "Talk-Back" Posts.
    3) (end point) Engagement/Follower Ratios.

LARGEST FOLLOWER GROWTH RATE DISPARITIES (<u>winners underlined</u>)

1. FL GOV: <u>Ron DeSantis</u> 389% - Andrew Gillum 23%   356
2. IA 03: <u>Cindy Axne</u> 337% - Rep. David Young 5%   332
3. MS SEN: Mike Espy 279% - <u>Sen. Cindy Hyde Smith</u> 19%   260
4. NC 09: <u>Marc Harris</u> 191% - Dan McCready 17%   174
5. NJ 03: Tom MacArthur 133% - <u>Andy Kim</u> 14%   119
6. FL 15: Kristen Carlson 107% - <u>Ross Spano</u> 4%   103
7. MN 01: <u>Jim Hagedorn</u> 130% - Daniel Feehan 37%   97
8. NV SEN: <u>Jacky Rosen</u> 75% - Dean Heller 12%   63

POP QUIZ

One candidate among the 126 examined actually lost Twitter followers:

September 1, 2018: 4,622

October 31, 2018: 4,591

I bet you can guess who it was....

Yes, Steve King (R-IA)!

He was one of four incumbent candidates who basically did not use a campaign Twitter Account in September and October....and the only one *so far* who won re-election.

The others: Karen Handel (GA 06), Steve Knight (CA 25), and Rob Woodall (GA 07).

LARGEST SHARE OF VOICE (total engagement) DISPARITIES

T-1   CA 25: Katie Hill – Rep. Steve Knight   99

T-1   GA 06: Lucy McBath – Rep. Karen Handel   99

T-1   GA 07: Carolyn Bourdeaux – Rep. Rob Woodall   99

T-1   IA 04: J.B. Scholten – Rep. Steve King   99

OK, but what about candidates who used Twitter and got poor reception/weak echoes?

LARGEST SHARE OF VOICE (total engagement) DISPARITIES

2. NY 27: <u>Nate McMurray</u> – Rep. Chris Collins   92   (96% - 4%)

3. OK 05: <u>Kendra Horn</u> – Rep. Steve Russell   86   (93% - 7%)

4. IL 14: <u>Lauren Underwood</u> – Rep. Randy Hultgren 82   (91% - 9%)

5. TX 23: Gina Ortiz Jones – <u>Rep. Will Hurd</u>   80   (90% - 10%)

6. TX 32: <u>Colin Allred</u> – Rep. Pete Sessions   76   (88% - 12%)

7. MI 08: <u>Elissa Slotkin</u> – Rep. Mike Bishop   74   (87% - 13%)

8. NC 13: Kathy Manning – <u>Rep. Ted Budd</u>   70   (85% - 15%)

LARGEST ENGAGEMENT/(end point) **FOLLOWER RATIOS**

1. MN 01   Jim Hagedorn   24.6   (Daniel Feehan 6.0)
2. GA GOV   Brian Kemp   20.6   (Stacey Abrams 4.8)
3. AZ SEN   Martha McSally   16.0   (Kyrsten Sinema 6.9)
4. MT SEN   Matt Rosendale   15.2   (Sen. Jon Tester 5.8)
5. IN SEN   Mike Braun   14.1   (Sen. Joe Donnelly 2.3)
6. TN SEN   Phil Bredesen   13.9   (Marsha Blackburn 9.6)
7. NV SEN   Jacky Rosen   12.2   (Sen. Dean Heller 5.9)
8. TX SEN   Beto O'Rourke   11.8 (5M!)   (Sen. Ted Cruz 1.2) (4M!)

Preliminary Findings

There does seem to be a connection between dense Twitter engagement and winning. But there are many other variables to consider. Next steps for our research:

• Interviews with digital strategists on selected campaign cases.

• Model-building with these & other Twitter metrics, (small donor) funds raised.

• Comparative keyword analysis (what did the tweets actually say?).
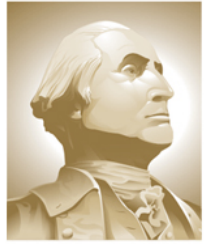
Thank you for your feedback and support!

Michael

corn@gwu.edu