



Coffee or Tea: The Emergence of Networks of Discourse In Two Online Political Groups

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BACKGROUND

Facebook groups associated with The Coffee Party and The Tea Party illustrate the different manifestations of political mobilization in the virtual space. The Coffee Party Facebook Group (Join the Coffee Party Movement) has over 358,000 followers and evolved from a strictly virtual presence to one that now exists in the physical world. In contrast, the Tea Party and their largest Facebook group (Tea Party Patriots) has over 657,500 followers and exists as an extension of a movement that began in the physical world.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do the agendas of the two Facebook groups differ?
2. How do roles of actors in each of the groups differ? Do actors participate in both networks?
3. How does the network change as a result of actions taken by the administrators?

METHODS AND SAMPLE

The sample includes all parent posts and comments collected from the two Facebook groups from 25 October 2010 – 12 January 2011. Join the Coffee Party Movement had 345 parent posts with 52,370 comments and Tea Party Patriots had 245 parent posts with 41,907 comments. The coding of parent posts and network analysis followed a previously established mixed method approach of analysis (Mascaro & Goggins, 2011).

Table 1: Percentage of Parent Posts by Category by Group

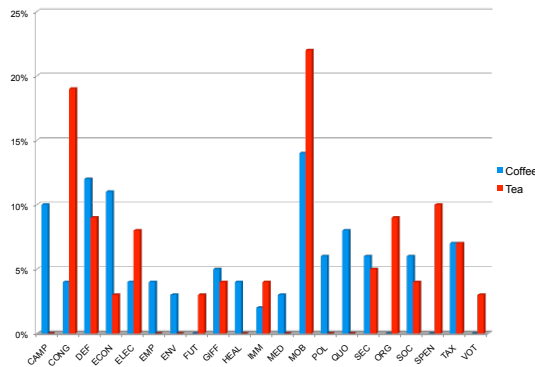


Table 2: Parent Post Categories and Top Betweenness Individuals in Both Groups

Code	Category	Coffee High BTW	Tea High BTW
CAMP	Campaign Finance	4077, 4127	n/a
CONG	Congress	4887, 41267	23565, 25165
DEF	Defining the Platform	4077, 4638	23565, 24372
ECON	Economy	4077, 5406	24057, 24417
ELEC	Election 2010	4749, 4560	24057, 24040
EMP	Employment	5109, 8404	n/a
ENV	Environment	4130, 5007	n/a
FUT	Future Planning	n/a	28049, 30906
GIFF	Giffords	n/a	n/a
HEAL	Health Care	5406, 6590	n/a
IMM	Immigration	5325, 5159	28823, 25165
MED	Media	4850, 4171	n/a
MOB	Mobilization	4077, 10786	25202, 24057
POL	Political Atmosphere	37208, 5099	n/a
QUO	Quotes	4077, 41148	n/a
SEC	Security	4077, 4885	21231, 24583
SOC	Social	6590, 5519	32417, 28823
ORG	Organizational Info	n/a	28037, 23003
SPEN	Spending	n/a	23565, 23983
TAX	Tax	13713, 10628	23565, 22861
VOT	Voter Fraud	n/a	24057, 22750

Table 3: Top Posters with Activity in Both Groups

User	Tea Posts	Coffee Posts	Role	Summary of Activity
7417	193	6	Tea Party dissenter	High amount of direct addresses; many constructive comments
22861	124	13	Tea Party supporter	Focuses on disseminating supporting information
26204	102	7	Centrist	Uses a lot of direct addresses to highlight illogical debate
5381	51	10	Centrist	Highlights problems with the arguments of both groups
7691	47	11	Tea Party fundamentalist	Tea Party fundamentalist, yet disagrees with direction and radical nature of the party
4694	1	187	Green Party supporter	Thinks that both parties are lacking; uses a lot of direct addresses
4171	2	124	Coffee Party supporter	Liberal leaning; Tea Party comments were negative but constructive
4086	16	116	Libertarian and Ron Paul supporter	Constructive, educated comments in both groups
27766	4	76	Tea Party dissenter	Thinks that both parties lack some focus; uses a lot of direct addresses to discuss points
28930	3	75	Self-proclaimed Centrist with very conservative views	Tea Party supporter as reflected in positive nature of posts in Tea Party group and disagreement of liberal statements made in Coffee Party group
6404	31	48	Libertarian and Ron Paul supporter	Against money in elections and recognizes the economic issues within America; uses both groups to discuss his viewpoint

Table 4: Top 5 Posters by Group and Direct Addressal Behavior

Coffee Party			Tea Party		
User	# of Posts	% Direct Addressal	User	# of Posts	% Direct Addressal
4077	407	21%	23565	653	34%
41240	322	42%	24057	500	30%
10628	235	28%	24269	296	82%
41148	196	55%	28823	239	17%
6590	188	52%	24040	222	77%

FINDINGS

- The agendas of the two groups differ significantly. Both parties use the groups to mobilize physical and virtual support. The Coffee Party focuses on campaign finance issues and the current political atmosphere. The Tea Party focuses on the actions of Congress and how to change existing policies.

- The Coffee Party Administrators are the most prolific contributors whereas the Tea Party Administrators only comment within the discourse 12 times. The most prolific Tea Party Actor is a dissenter.

- Participants utilize different mechanisms of direct addressal and for different purposes.

- 14,165 individuals participated in the Coffee Party discourse, 14,090 individuals participated in the Tea Party discourse and 271 individuals participated in both groups.

- The network analysis indicates that raw post count is not a valid measure of prominence in the network. Individuals with low total post counts are important in certain categories of discourse.

FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Analysis of specific time periods within the groups
2. Longitudinal analysis of how individuals participate within or depart from the group
3. Network analysis to include measures of network position and roles of actors
4. Development of more robust methods to identify discourse within a parent post

REFERENCES

Mascaro, C. and Goggins, S. 2011. Brewing up Citizen Engagement: The Coffee Party on Facebook. *Communities & Technologies* 2011, June 29 – July 2, 2011. Brisbane, Australia

