

Affect-Driven Social Sharing of Political Information

Theory and Hypotheses

Theoretical Background

- ◆ Widespread Political Ignorance (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996)
- ◆ Socially Shared Cognition (Thompson & Fine 1999)
- ◆ Emotional Contagion/Convergence (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rupson 1993; Anderson & Keltner 2003)

Hypotheses

People share emotionally evocative information about political policies and candidates in order to effect attitudinal convergence among in-group members

H1 Affective Transmission: Information that evokes an affective response is shared at a higher rate than is affectively neutral information

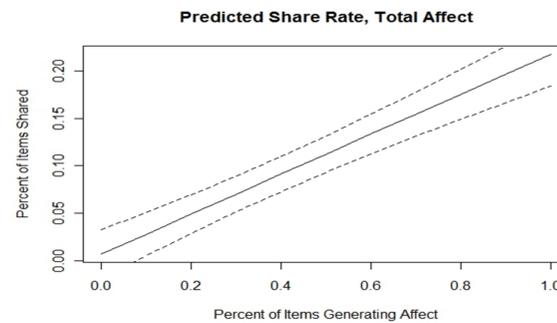
H2 Affective Contagion: Information arriving from an in-group source generates more affective reactions than does similar information arriving from an out-group source

H3 Social Transmission: Information arriving from an in-group source is more likely to be shared than similar information arriving from an out-group source

Empirical Evidence

Study One: Affective Transmission

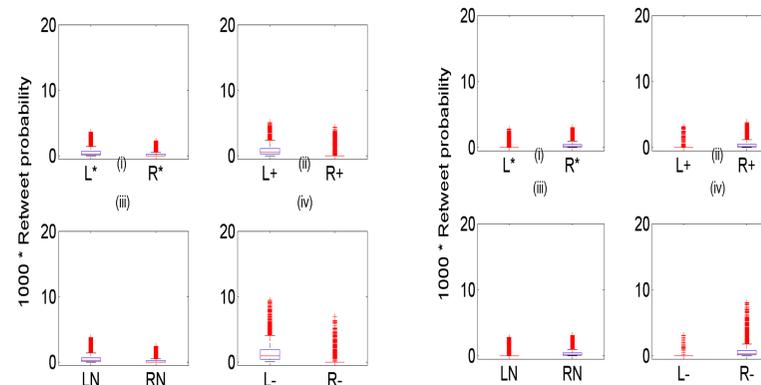
Subjects: 253 subjects recruited from Amazon's MTurk service
 Method: Subjects evaluated a number of political statements during a simulated presidential primary
 Independent Variable: Percent of items generating affect
 Dependent Variable: Percent of items subject indicated



Results: Affect is a significant predictor of sharing propensity ($\beta = .21, p < .000$)

Study Three: Affective Transmission & Social Transmission

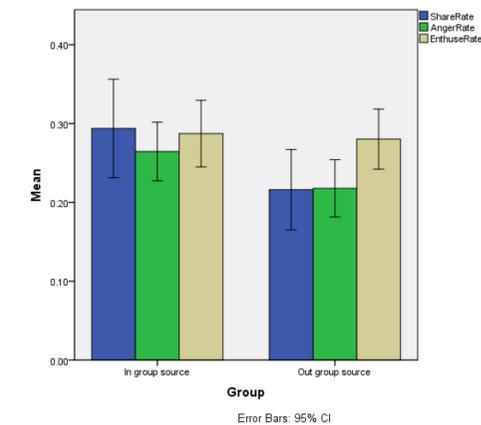
Data: Re-tweets from ~17,000 Twitter users collected from August to October 2012
 Methods: Tweets were coded for sentiment using Stanford's sentiment API; Tweeters political affiliation coded both manually and using SVM classifier
 Independent variables: Tweet sentiment and party affiliation of the tweeter
 Dependent variables: Probability of re-tweeting (sharing)



Results: Subjects who receive Tweets from both parties are more likely to re-tweet messages from in-party sources; affectively charged tweets are more likely to be shared than neutral tweets

Study Two: Affective Contagion & Social Transmission

Subjects: 142 Democrats recruited from Amazon's MTurk service
 Method: Subjects were asked to evaluate a number of persuasive communications about political candidates. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two groups: half saw the messages sourced to a fellow Democrat; the rest saw the exact same messages sourced to a Republican.
 Independent Variable: Message source
 Dependent Variables: Percent of items generating affect; Percent of items shared



Results: In-group communications generated more sharing behavior (29% vs 22%, $p < .059$) and more anger (26% vs. 22%, $p < .076$) than out-group communications. No difference in enthusiasm rates however (29% vs. 28%)

Conclusions and Further Research

- ◆ Both correlational and experimental studies provide support for our hypotheses
- ◆ More work to be done:
 - ~ Differences in Republican and Democratic behavior?
 - ~ Differences based on electoral context?
 - ~ Attempts to test hypotheses with groups in the lab?