Productive Dialogue and Disagreement on Twitter

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Keeping the Public Sphere Open
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Motivation

“Political dialogue” is critical to civic health

Conversations may take place in diverse settings
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Tweet: Specimen FMNH PR2081
@SUETheTrex
I think we can call agree:

If Shakespeare were alive today, he would be managing a dinosaur's ironic twitter presence instead of plays.
“A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.”

Habermas (1964)
The Dream of the Internet

- Open to all
- Public conversation
- Cross-cutting political debate and deliberation
- Ultimate public sphere
Reality

MarinaGipps @MarinaGipps · Jan 25
@Polls @Buzzfeed #TheResistance #TrumpTrain #Trump #Clooney Could George Clooney beat President Donald Trump in a 2020 General Election?

67% Yes
33% No
Dwayne Merritt
@MerrittDwayne

@HuffingtonPost With a corrupt government, ISIS, crooked Hillary, now we have people chasing a Pokemon around. WTH is wrong with people!

6:48 PM - 18 Jul 2016
Reality

Account suspended
This account has been suspended. Learn more about why Twitter suspends accounts, or return to your timeline.
Research Question

What makes a productive political conversation?
Research Question

- Individual characteristics
- Situation or context
- Topic of discussion
- Interactions between discussants
Data

- Over 1 million Twitter “conversations”
- Collected between May 2016 – January 2017
Data

Dialogue-related keywords:
- agree, agreed, great point
- disagree, wrong, bad idea, stupid idea
- good point, understand, interesting, I see

Political keywords:
- Trump, Clinton, Hillary
- Election, president, politics
- Political hashtags
Data: Subset

- 607,135 Tweets
- 166,798 Users
- 79,983 Conversations
Model

• What types of conversation do people have?
• What makes a conversation go well or poorly?
Developing a typology of conversations:

- Conversation is a sequence of tweets, $t_1 \ldots t_n$

- Each tweet has:
  - $a$: Aspect (topic)
  - $s$: Sentiment (+ / - )
  - $d$: Dialogue type
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- Each conversation has:
  - $A$: Content of conversation
  - $S + D$: Style of conversation
Model

t_1 → t_2 → t_3

a_1 ↗ a_2 ↗ a_3 ↗

s_1 ↘ s_2 ↘ s_3 ↘

d_1 → d_2 → d_3

t : Tweet
a : topic
s : sentiment
d : dialogue type
Model

A : Content of Conversation

S + D : Style of Conversation
Examples
Manuel Cárdenas @jmcardenas_ 6 Jul 2016
@katfishkevin @Bear2theRight The supreme court makes judgements on legal issues. If there are no charges filed, there's no legal issue.

Kevin Ray Decker @katfishkevin 6 Jul 2016
@jmcardenas_ @Bear2theRight AIRBORNE RANGERS ARE THE LAW!

Manuel Cárdenas @jmcardenas_ 6 Jul 2016
@katfishkevin @Bear2theRight Sorry, I don't understand. Just trying to say the FBI would need to indict, and they say there are no grounds.

Kevin Ray Decker @katfishkevin 6 Jul 2016
@jmcardenas_ @Bear2theRight Have You Ever Heard of the Barracks Bombings @ Beirut in 1983? I Was supposed to go to AIRBORNE SCHOOL. I Did.

Manuel Cárdenas @jmcardenas_ 6 Jul 2016
@katfishkevin @Bear2theRight I hadn't, but it was very interesting to read about. Thank you.
Michael Beaton @mhbx · 5 Jul 2016
Which politician, much less "business man" could withstand the opposition, legal & personal inquiry that Clinton has and still be standing?

Mark @markg0077 · 5 Jul 2016
@mhbx It's all about having the corrupt connections with Obama. Hillary & Bill Clinton are filthy criminals.

Michael Beaton @mhbx · 6 Jul 2016
@markg0077 And Trump is ??clean as a babies butt? As i said elsewhere he cannot even hold up under his University inquiry..He is a Wiz of Oz

Mark @markg0077 · 6 Jul 2016
@mhbx The Obama delusion, fueled by toxic debt, 1,500% faster than Carter debt, is worse than the Carter Malaise. Bubbles will burst
Dylan Devenyi @DylanDevenyi · Jan 8
@JesseRBecker @btgerges @nickconfessore Republicans won the popular in the house where every state actually voted

johanna quirk @QuirkJoan · Jan 8
@DylanDevenyi gerrymandering in 2010 means auto win in House of Reps if I understand ur point to be they won that house...

Dylan Devenyi @DylanDevenyi · Jan 8
@QuirkJoan gerrymandering is irrelevant to the house popular which they also won

johanna quirk @QuirkJoan · Jan 8
@DylanDevenyi good point but with only about 49% voting I am not sure it is representative. Lot to mull over
A typology of dialogue

Sentiment moves
- A(+) B(-) A(+) B(-) : The saint
- A(+) B(-) A(-) B(-) : The usual
- A(+) B(-) A(+) B(+) : The recovery

Dialogue moves
- Disagreement, question, fact, acknowledgement, etc.

Content moves
- Let’s talk about the weather instead
  → What should we be looking for?
Next: discovery and institution-building

- What conditions further good dialogue types?
- How do we change social media or other institutions to further those conditions?
- Dialogue bots who occasionally interject:
  
  “Good point!”
  
  ?