Introduction

The modern age is deeply woven in the internet, and thereby social media. Due to this permeation of our human experiences by social media, social media has also transformed modern politics. Given the significance of social media in the 2016 Presidential election, it is important to stay attuned to the ways social media can affect politics. This research hones in on Twitter and the demographic with the greatest investment and understanding of the internet and social media: the Generation Z population. By using a framework of in-group and out-group biases, this research aims to study how content on Twitter can shape the political views of individuals from this particular Generation Z demographic.

Research Question

What is the impact of Twitter on political views?

Methodology

1. Participants: University of Nevada students from ages 18-24 years old.
2. All participants pre-surveyed to ascertain political affiliation, political views, and voting behavior.
3. Created two Twitter accounts.
4. Retweeted content on both the two Twitter accounts from January through March.
5. Conducted a post-survey of the same questions from that of the pre-survey.

Treatment

The treatment consists of exposing the Twitter participants to different types of tweets. Here are example tweets:

Neutral news tweet:

Political tweet:

Results

A one-sided t-test showed that a shift difference of 2.26 or more was significant. Because the surveys used Likert scales, that figure was rounded to an integer of 2.

Conclusions

- Viral, political content on Twitter is most likely to impact the political opinions of Independents or those not affiliated with a party.
- The political persuasion of content on Twitter can evoke a polarizing response by users who subscribe to the opposition ideology. See Figures 8-10.
- Elections as an event might function to increase partisanship. See Figures 5-7.
- Cruz and Immigration had the most changes from pre-survey to post-survey. See Figure 11.

Limitations of the study: Figure 11

- Confounding factors- the other media content that the participants consumed is not filtered.
- The sample size is small.
- One-sided treatment.

Suggestions for further research:

- Conduct the study with a right-wing treatment.
- Conduct the study on a different social networking site.
- Conduct the study with only Independents or those unaffiliated.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Nevada Undergraduate Research Award.

This research was conducted under the guidance of Dr. Steven Wilson.