

Title: Messaging Migration on Social Media: Patterns of Migration/Immigration related Information Flows among Non-elite Users on Twitter

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As social media platforms become important as sources of information and in shaping people's political views, it is important to understand the processes by which information and communications on immigrants/immigration are created, disseminated and consumed by citizens via social media. Political Scientists and Media & Communications Studies scholars who have examined social structures and online networks, have raised concern about development of filter bubbles or echo chambers that create fragmented publics. However, the evidence for echo-chambers is not clear-cut. Further, Dubois and Black (2018) have recently advocated for a methodological focus on the 'entire media environment' with which individuals interact rather than focus on single platforms. In this paper we focus on the choices that non-elite Twitter users in the UK make in their migration related news and information consumption and sharing practices. It builds on the first author's earlier qualitative research on constructions of the politics of belonging on a five percent random sample of a Twitter corpus of 47,978 tweets posted in temporal proximity to the lifting of transitional controls on Romanian and Bulgarian migrants in the UK (1 October 2013 to 1 March 2014). That research found highly polarised attitudes to immigration amongst non-elites in the online environment, with anti-immigration sentiments exhibiting a cohesive set of values related to an exclusionary nationalism. Pro-immigration sentiments contested these racialized, exclusionary understandings of the nation but drew on multiple, and sometimes contradictory values. These findings led to new research questions that we examine here: a) what are the patterns of information consumption and sharing on the topic of migration/immigration among non-elite Twitter users in the UK?; and b) Are there structural differences in information flows among non-elite users who anti-immigrant and those who are pro-immigrant? We harness computational approaches to iteratively carry out recursive surface 'thematic' mapping (Davidson et al 2019) of big qualitative data to investigate these new research questions. Our findings point to the importance of the 'entire media environment'. Both online and offline information and news from media sources, political actors, organisations and individuals shape the 'conversation' related to immigration on Twitter during the research period. Those expressing anti-immigrant sentiments may be part of an echo-chamber influenced by UKIP to a large extent. This suggests an explanation for cohesive set of values found in lead author's earlier research. Pro-immigration sentiments are influenced by a wider range of information and news sources. This suggests an explanation for the multiple and sometimes contradictory values embedded in pro-immigration attitudes found in the earlier research. Our findings highlight the value of iterative methodological approaches when using social media data, and have implications for future research on the role of Twitter's algorithms in making some users/topics more visible and how it can shape strategies to counter exclusive constructions of the nation and for generating rational dialogue towards inclusion and social solidarity in the UK.