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Despite its all-encompassing title, Parmelee and Bichard’s book offers an analysis of political Twitter use in a very specific context. The authors examine the motivations of users who subscribe to—in Twitter parlance, “follow”—Twitter messages by political actors and the content of the tweets—messages of up to 140 characters in length—by political candidates. They do so to answer a series of questions: What are the motivations of people to follow political actors on Twitter? Do tweets by political actors influence the actions and attitudes of their followers? Do people mostly follow political actors who share their opinion, or do they avoid those who have different opinions? What value do followers of political actors attribute to Twitter? And finally, how do political candidates use Twitter during campaigns? The book offers a number of interesting insights into these questions. The analyses in this book are based on the results of a survey of 426 self-selected Twitter users who follow political actors. To increase the understanding of the patterns shown in this survey, the authors also conducted 18 in-depth interviews to give their respondents more room to explain their political Twitter use. In the final chapter, the authors perform a content analysis of tweets by 26 candidates in various competitive races in the 2010 campaign cycle in the United States. Parmelee and Bichard present the results of their analyses clearly and transparently with regard to the quantitative analysis. Still, there remain some limitations of their study, mainly based on the research design chosen by the authors and a very limited model of potential effects of political Twitter use that exclusively focuses on self-reported direct effects on individuals who follow political actors on Twitter.

In chapter two, the authors address the motivations that lead users to follow politicians on Twitter. The authors discuss the results of their survey in context with the literature on uses and gratifications of media use. They found that among their participants a mixture of the following motivations was connected to Twitter use: social utility, entertainment, self-expression, information guidance, and convenience. The authors position these results nicely in the context of other studies following the uses and gratifications approach that examine political information-seeking on other social networking sites and blogs. In doing this, they show that the act of following political actors on Twitter shares the same motivations as looking for political information on blogs but is most akin to befriending politicians on social networking sites. Unfortunately, the design of the study does not allow for a comparison of the motivations for following politicians, celebrities in other fields, journalists, and normal Twitter
users. Thus, it is difficult to assess these results in the context of Twitter use in general.

Chapter 3 deals with the influence of political tweets on the followers of political actors. Under *influence*, the authors understand actions taken by users based on tweets (i.e., clicking on links in tweets, retweeting, contributing to a campaign, signing a petition) and influences on the political views of followers. The authors come to the conclusion that Twitter has much more political influence than suggested by other studies. Their conclusions are based on survey questions and interviews. The authors seem rather uncritical of the possibility that the strong influence they measure might not so much be based on the effects of Twitter for the general population, or even the general population of users following political actors, but instead might be explained by the methods chosen by the authors. First, their results rely completely on self-reported behavior of the respondents in their sample. This alone might lead to a significant overestimation of the true effects of Twitter on actions or attitudes. The results would be much more robust if some experimental testing of effects on behavior or attitude changes in reactions to political tweets had been performed. Twitter offers a promising research environment for designs like this, as every action by users on Twitter can be measured. Instead of asking people what element of a tweet by a political leader made them act on it, tweets could be coded based on various content elements and their reach (e.g., further distribution of the tweet by retweets), and their impact (e.g., clicks on links, resulting contacts by users) could be measured. On Twitter, there is really no need to rely on self-reported behavior, since there are plenty of data on actual behavior. A second reason why the comparatively high influence of Twitter might be a result of the research design is that the authors seem to have a significant number of consultants, journalists, and political activists in their survey sample and among their interviewees. A first indicator of this is the surprisingly high level of political interest reported by the respondents in their survey (an average of 9.1 on a 10-point scale, SD = 1.5). Unfortunately, the authors do not offer a systematic account of the occupations of the respondents of their survey and the in-depth interviews. Still, in the presentation of the results they sometimes refer to the occupations of their interviewees in the text, which indicates that their sample was biased toward responses from political professionals, consultants, activists, and journalists. This makes the results much less surprising and suggests some caution about generalizing from the results reported here.

In chapter 4, the authors examine whether there is evidence of selective exposure to supportive political viewpoints or selective avoidance of contradicting political opinions among followers of political actors on Twitter. They operationalize this question by asking their respondents if they follow political actors that share their political opinion or not. The authors then examine whether the tendency to follow political leaders that share one’s opinion or to avoid political leaders opposing one’s opinion is connected to demographic, political, or motivational factors. They show that roughly the same percentage
of their respondents followed political actors they disagreed with (41 percent) as those who followed only political actors they agreed with (43 percent). They found that strong ideological conviction led users to be more likely to follow only political actors they agreed with.

In chapter 5, the authors examine the in-depth interviews with 18 respondents for the political value they derived from using Twitter. Users responded that they use Twitter to quickly get unfiltered information from political actors, to serve as a soapbox to reach and potentially influence political actors who share their own political beliefs and convictions, and also as a resource for users who were themselves political professionals.

For chapter 6, the authors change their perspective and analyze the content of tweets by 26 candidates in various competitive races of the 2010 U.S. campaign cycle. They find that the candidates in their sample tended to refer in their tweets predominantly to the campaign, political opponents, and calls to action. Also, candidates tended to use tweets to inform their followers of media appearances and quotes and to post links to further campaign-related information.

In their conclusion, the authors formulate their belief that Twitter is an important element of political communication. This may be, but Parmelee and Bichard show only a very specific slice of the potential political influences of Twitter. They focus on potential direct effects on Twitter followers and disregard indirect effects of Twitter on political communication. This is all the more surprising as much of the current literature on the role of the Internet in politics focuses on indirect effects. This is because direct effects are both notoriously difficult to measure and theoretically hard to conceptualize given that Internet-enabled services are increasingly used in concert with other media. Also, the choice by the authors to predominantly rely on self-reported behavior measured in survey responses and interviews of self-selected respondents fits some traditions of media research but ultimately falls short of using the full potential of data on human behavior online. Especially in their discussion of the political influence of tweets on followers of political actors, the authors’ choice is negatively felt. So, while this book offers some new and interesting facts on the motivations of Twitter users to follow political actors on Twitter, unfortunately many other questions the authors address in their text are answered less convincingly. The Internet and related phenomena offer moving targets for researchers. This book illustrates some of the problems of approaching these targets with conventional research designs.

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