

Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Members' Use of Twitter and Facebook During a Two-Month Period in the 112th Congress

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Summary

Communication between Members of Congress and their constituents has changed with the development of new online social networking services. Many Members now use e-mail, official websites, blogs, YouTube channels, Twitter, and Facebook pages to communicate with their constituents—technologies that were either non-existent or not widely available 20 years ago.

Social networking services have arguably served to enhance the ability of Members of Congress to fulfill their representational duties by providing greater opportunities for communication between the Member and individual constituents. In addition, electronic communication technology has reduced the marginal cost of constituent communications; unlike postal letters, Members can reach large numbers of constituents for a fixed cost.

This report examines Member adoption and use of two social networking services: Twitter and Facebook. The report analyzes data on Member use of Twitter and Facebook collected by an academic institution in collaboration with the Congressional Research Service during a two-month period between August and October 2011 and the adoption of both platforms as of January 2012. This report analyzes the following questions related to Member use of Twitter and Facebook:

- What proportion of Members use Twitter and Facebook?
- How often are Members using Twitter and Facebook?
- How widely are Member Tweets and posts being followed?
- What are Members Tweeting and posting about?

This report provides a snapshot of a dynamic process. As with any new technology, the number of Members using Twitter and Facebook, and the patterns of use, may change rapidly in short periods of time. As a result, the conclusions drawn from these data cannot be easily generalized or used to predict future behavior.

The data show that, at the time of the study, 451 (of 541) Representatives (including Delegates and the Resident Commissioner) and Senators were registered with Twitter (83.4%) and 487 (of 541) Representatives and Senators were registered with Facebook (90%). During the study period—August to October 2011—a total of 30,765 "Tweets" were sent and 16,261 Facebook posts were made. The data show that

- overall, registered Members sent an average of 1.24 Tweets and 0.63 Facebook posts per day;
- Senate Republicans sent the most Tweets per day (1.53 on average), followed by Senate Democrats (1.49), House Republicans (1.23), and House Democrats (1.09);
- for Facebook, Senate Republicans posted the most (0.84 on average), followed by House Republicans (0.71), Senate Democrats (0.53), and House Democrats (0.48); and
- the data also suggest that the top 20% of Twitter and Facebook users account for over 50% of the Tweets and posts during this study.

Use of Twitter and Facebook was analyzed by coding Tweets and posts into seven categories: position taking, district or state, official congressional action, policy statement, media, personal, and other. The data suggest position taking is the most frequent type of Tweet (41%) and Facebook post (39%). This is followed by district or state (26% of Tweets and 32% of Facebook posts); official action (17% of Tweets and 21% of Facebook posts); and policy statements (16% of Tweets and 16% of Facebook posts).

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Introduction

Communication between Members of Congress and their constituents has changed with the development of new online social networking services. Many Members now use e-mail, official websites, blogs, YouTube channels, Twitter, and Facebook pages to communicate with their constituents—technologies that were either non-existent or not widely available 20 years ago.

These technologies have arguably served to enhance the ability of Members of Congress to fulfill their representational duties by providing greater opportunities for communication between the Member and individual constituents, supporting the fundamental democratic role of sharing information about public policy and government operations.[1] Despite these advantages, electronic communications have raised some concerns. Existing law and chamber regulations on the use of communication media such as the franking privilege have proven difficult to adapt to the new electronic technologies.

This report examines Member use of two electronic communication mediums: Twitter and Facebook. After providing an overview and background of each medium, the report analyzes patterns of Member use of Twitter and Facebook during a two-month period in 2011.[2] This report is inherently a snapshot of a dynamic process. As with any new technology, the number of Members using Twitter and Facebook and the patterns of use may change rapidly. Thus, the conclusions drawn from these data cannot be easily generalized nor can these results be used to predict future behavior.

Constituent Communication

Members of Congress have more choices and options available to communicate with constituents than they did 20 years ago. In addition to traditional modes of communication such as townhall meetings, telephone calls, and postal mail, Members can now reach their constituents via e-mail, websites, tele-townhalls, online videos, social networking sites, and other electronic-based communication applications.

The rise of such electronic communication has altered the traditional patterns of communication between Members and constituents. Although virtually all Members continue to use traditional modes of constituent communication, use of new communications technology is increasing.[3] For

[1] Alfred A. Porro and Stuart A. Ascher, "The Case for the Congressional Franking Privilege," *University of Toledo Law Review*, vol. 5 (Winter 1974), pp. 280-281.

[2] Other studies have been conducted on the use of Twitter by Members of Congress. For example see Jennifer Golbeck, Justin Grimes, and Anthony Rogers, "Twitter Use by the U.S. Congress," working paper, College Park, MD, 2009. (Herineafter, *Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers, 2009*.) Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers collected a total of approximately 6,000 Tweets for their analysis. A copy is available from CRS upon request. Also, see University of Maryland, College Park, "UM Study Shows Congressional Use of Twitter Falls Short," press release, September 15, 2009, at http://www.newsdesk.umd.edu/culture/release.cfm?articleID=1964.

[3] For journalistic accounts of the rise of electronic communications in Congress, see Elizabeth Brotherton, "A Different Kind of Revolution; Technology Redefines Constituent Outreach," *Roll Call*, September 10, 2007, p. 1; Amy Doolittle, "31 Days, 32 Million Messages," *Politico*, February 27, 2007, p. 1; Jonathan Kaplan, "2008 Candidates search Web for next new thing," *The Hill*, November 29, 2006, p. 6; David Haase, "Twitter: One More Medium, Much Shorter Messages," *Roll Call*, July 23, 2009, p. 4; and Daniel de Vise, "Tweeting Their Own Horns," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2009, p. A13.

example, prior to 1995, there were virtually no e-mail exchanges between Members and constituents.[4] In 2011, over 243 million e-mails were received by the House of Representatives.[5] The Senate received 83 million emails in 2011.[6]

Member official websites, blogs, YouTube channels, and Facebook pages—all non-existent 20 years ago—also receive significant traffic.[7] Conversely, the amount of postal mail sent to Congress has dropped by more than 50% during the same time period.[8] In addition, electronic technology has reduced the marginal cost of constituent communications; unlike postal letters, Members can reach large numbers of constituents for a fixed cost.[9]

Twitter

Created in 2006 by developer Jack Dorsey as a tool to keep in touch with friends, Twitter is a web-based social networking service that allows users to send and read short messages.[10] Also considered a micro-blogging site, Twitter users send "Tweets" of up to 140 characters. These Tweets are displayed on an author's Twitter home page and on the pages of people subscribed to his or her RSS feed.[11]

Sending Tweets

Twitter enables individual users to post thoughts on any number of topics or activities. While Twitter use varies, it has been used by individuals and organizations to state opinions, promote events, and announce the release of products and services. Several legislative branch entities

[4] Chris Casey, *The Hill on the Net: Congress Enters the Information Age* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Academic Press, Inc., 1996), pp. 29-35.

[5] Data provided by the Office of the Chief Administrative Office, House of Representatives for all external emails sent to House users. These data do not include internal emails sent from one House user to another.

[6] Data provided by the Senate Sergeant at Arms.

[7] A survey of the YouTube Senate Hub homepage (http://www.YouTube.com/user/senatehub) finds a large range in the number of views each video has received. Some videos have only a few dozen views while others have received tens of thousands of views.

[8] Data provided by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives and the Office of the Secretary of the Senate. See also Kathy Goldschmidt and Leslie Ochreiter, *Communicating with Congress: How the Internet has Changed Citizen Identification*, Congressional Management Foundation (Washington, DC), at http://nposoapbox.s3.amazonaws.com/cmfweb/CWC_CitizenEngagement.pdf. Reduction in mail to congressional offices might also be a response to other factors, including increased mail screening following anthrax being found in mail sent to Senate offices in October 2002. For more information on the response to anthrax in the mail and mail irradiation, see U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Mail Irradiation," at http://www.epa.gov/rpdweb00/sources/mail_irrad.html.

[9] This substantially differentiates electronic mail from franked mail, which does incur a marginal cost. See CRS Report RL34188, *Congressional Official Mail Costs*, by Matthew Eric Glassman.

[10] Twitter, "Where did Twitter Come From?," *About Twitter*, http://twitter.com/about. For more information about social networking, see Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Networking Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1 (October 2007), pp. 210-230; and Lee Humphreys, "Mobile Social Networks and Social Practice: A Case Study of Dodgeball," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1 (October 2007), pp. 341-360.

[11] An RSS feed, which stands for Really Simple Syndication, is an opt-in service that allows users to receive targeted content from webpages, blogs, and online news sources. For more information see Tom Barnes, "RSS: Marketing's Newest Communication Channel," *Journal of Website Promotion*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2005), pp. 15-30.

actively use Twitter to communicate with interested parties. These include the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO),[12] the Library of Congress (LOC),[13] and the Government Printing Office (GPO).[14] In addition, Restaurant Associates, the House's food service vendor, uses Twitter to announce daily specials and events. Posting under the user name "@ushrcafes," a typical Tweet might look like this:

> Celebrate National Cupcake Day at Creamery and Capitol Market today![15]

Because of the 140 character limit on Tweets, Twitter messages are necessarily short. The brevity of the messages highlights the ease in which Tweets can be quickly sent from mobile devices to followers around the world. The rapid transmission of information allows individuals and groups to communicate instantly without limitation of physical distance.

Following Twitter

Twitter allows individual users to "follow" other Twitter subscribers and read their Tweets from the Twitter homepage. Individuals may choose to follow another Twitter account if they are interested in the information provided, are friends with the Twitter account holder, or if they are a "fan" of an activity or place. Following another user's Twitter account allows for almost instant access to his or her Tweets. This can be useful if a follower is looking for a featured item or to better understand the activities of the person or group he or she is following. Individuals who "follow" an individual Twitter user can have instant access to Tweets through devices such as a Blackberry® , iPhone, or other similar mobile, Internet-ready devices.

Facebook

Launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and several of his classmates at Harvard College, Facebook is the world's largest social networking service and website.[16] Facebook provides "profiles"[17] and "pages"[18] for users, both of which are personalized websites within Facebook on which users can post pictures, videos, and messages, upon which other users may post comments. Users can limit the visibility of their profile posts to other users who they have

[12] U.S. Government Accountability Office, at http://twitter.com/usgao.

[13] Library of Congress, at http://twitter.com/librarycongress. Additionally, some divisions of the Library of Congress maintain Twitter accounts. These include the Maps Division (@LOCMaps); the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (@ndiipp); the U.S. Copyright Office (@CopyrightOffice); and THOMAS, the legislative information system (@THOMASdotgov); the Congressional Research Service (@CRS4Congress); and the Law Library of Congress (@LawLibCongress).

[14] U.S. Government Printing Office, at http://twitter.com/USGPO.

[15] House Dining Services, tweet, December 14, 2012, https://twitter.com/ushrcafes/status/279584407906549760.

[16] "Ashlee Vance, "Facebook: The Making of 1 Billion Users," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, October 4, 2012, at http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-10-04/facebook-the-making-of-1-billion-users.

[17] A profile or timeline is each user's "collection of the photos, stories, and experiences that tell [their] story." For more information, see "profile" on Facebook, "Facebook Glossary," at http://www.facebook.com/help/glossary; and Facebook, "Timeline," at http://www.facebook.com/help/timeline.

[18] A Facebook page "allow[s] businesses, brands, and celebrities to connect with people on Facebook. Admins can post information and News Feed updates to people who like their pages." For more information, see "Page," on Facebook, "Facebook Gallery," at http://www.facebook.com/help/glossary.

personally approved ("friends"). A Facebook user can become a fan of a page, however, simply by clicking "like" on the Facebook page of interest; owner approval is not required.

Once a Facebook user becomes a fan of a page, the activity of the "liked" page appears on the user's "newsfeed."[19] A newsfeed contains activities by a user's friends, along with content generated by the pages of which the user is a fan. Thus, each Facebook user's newsfeed is personalized.[20] Newsfeed content can include links to news stories, personal updates, videos, comments, and photographs.

The profiles of individual Facebook users also contain a "timeline," which chronologically captures all of the user's posts. Other users may also post to someone's timeline, if the two users are "friends," and if the user permits such a post.

Data Analysis

This report analyzes the following questions related to Member use of Twitter and Facebook:

- What proportion of Members use Twitter and Facebook?
- How often do Members use Twitter and Facebook?
- What are Members Tweeting and posting about?

Methodology

For two consecutive months—August 25 to October 24, 2011—the Tweets and Facebook posts of Representatives and Senators who were registered to use Twitter and Facebook were collected. To collect these data, CRS partnered with graduate students at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. Custom programming scripts were developed that queried both Facebook and Twitter's Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and pulled account-specific information from Members' official public accounts. A second dataset capturing Member adoption of Twitter and Facebook was collected in January 2012, reflecting the most recent Member additions to social media available in the data collection phase of the research project. These adoption data were used to analyze Member use of Twitter and Facebook.

The unit of analysis is the individual Tweet or Facebook post. A total of 47,004 cases are included in the dataset—30,765 Tweets and 16,239 Facebook posts. Data collection was automated and characteristics, including the date, time, and content were captured. After an initial examination of the content and a review of established coding schemes used to catalog similar data, researchers devised a comprehensive set of coding categories.[21] The research team then examined each Tweet or post and recorded the appropriate coding results. Coding was subjected to an internal reliability test to validate inter-coder consistency. Tweets or Facebook posts could be coded into more than one category.

[19] "Facebook Glossary."

[20] Ibid.

[21] See CRS Report R41066, *Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Month Period in the 111th Congress*, by Matthew Eric Glassman, Jacob R. Straus, and Colleen J. Shogan.

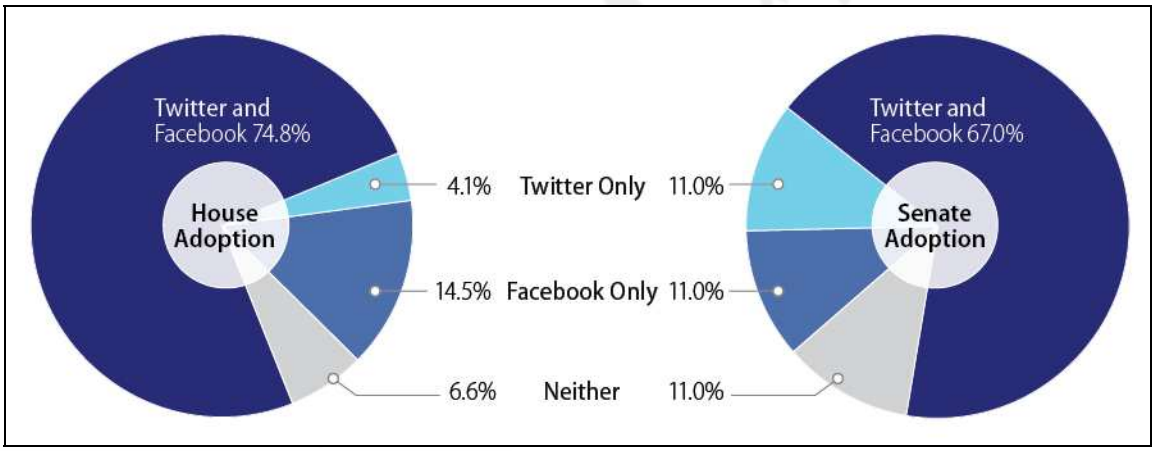
Several caveats accompany the results presented. First, the analysis treats all Member Tweets and Facebook posts as structurally identical, because each individual Tweet or post reveals no information about who physically typed the message. In some cases, Members might personally Tweet or post, whereas other Members may delegate these responsibilities to staff. CRS draws no distinction between the two. Second, the analysis covers only two months of Member activity. Therefore, it is inherently a snapshot in time of a dynamic process. As with any new technology, the number of Members using Twitter and the patterns of use may change rapidly in short periods of time. Thus, the conclusions drawn from these data cannot be easily generalized. Finally, these results cannot be used to predict future behavior.

Who Is Using Twitter and Facebook?

As of January 24, 2012, a total of 426 of 541 Members of Congress (78.7%) had an official congressional account registered with Twitter, and 472 Members (87.2%) had an official congressional account registered on Facebook.[22] **Figure 1** shows the proportion of Members in the House and Senate who had an official account with Twitter, Facebook, both, or neither, as of January 24, 2012, respectively.

Figure 1. Twitter and Facebook: House and Senate Adoption Proportions

As of January 24, 2012



Source: LBJ School of Public Affairs and CRS data analysis.

These numbers reflect an increase in adoption over the previous two years. As of September 2009, only 205 Members—39 Senators and 166 Representatives (a total of 38%)—had been registered with Twitter.[23]

Figure 2 shows the percentage of Members who have adopted Twitter and Facebook, by chamber and party affiliation, as of January 2012. As in 2009, a variation in adoption of social media

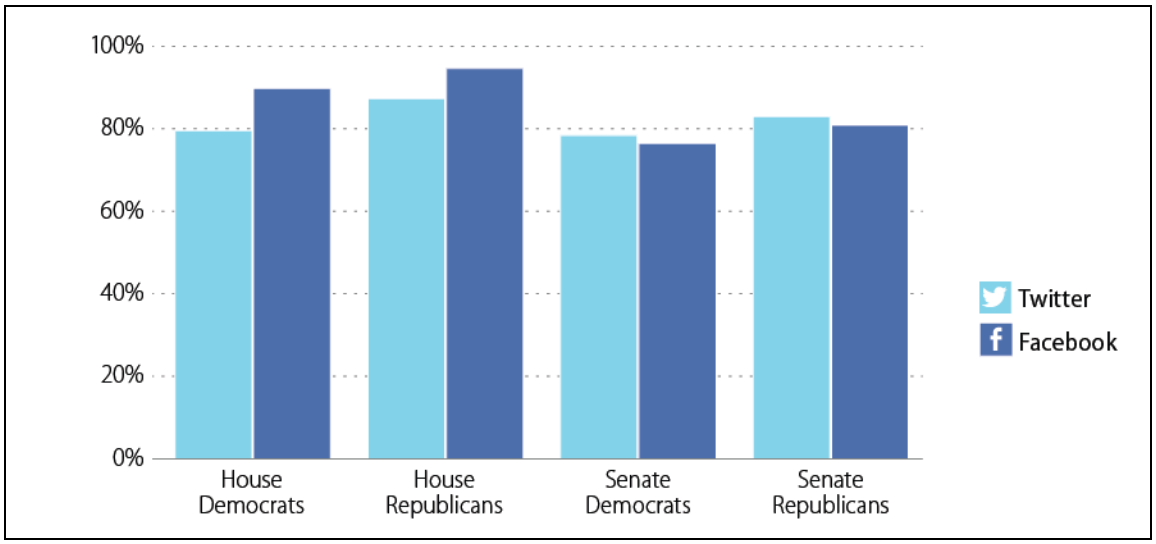
[22] The total number of Members of Congress includes 435 Representatives, 100 Senators, five delegates (American Samoa, District of Columbia, Guam, Northern Marianas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and one Resident Commissioner (Puerto Rico).

[23] For information on Member adoption of Twitter, see CRS Report R41066, *Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Month Period in the 111th Congress*, by Matthew Eric Glassman, Jacob R. Straus, and Colleen J. Shogan.

continued to exist among parties, especially in the House of Representatives. The gap between parties remains similar for Twitter.[24] Whereas in 2009, 60% of Twitter-registered Members were Republican and 40% were Democrats, in 2012, 56% of Twitter-registered Members were Republican and 44% were Democrats.

Figure 2. Twitter and Facebook Adoption by Chamber and Party

As of January 24, 2012



Source: LBJ School of Public Affairs and CRS data analysis.

Earlier studies of social media adoption showed that House Republicans were the most likely adopters of Twitter.[25] That finding continues to be true for both Twitter and Facebook. For the 112th Congress (2011-2012), House Republicans had the highest adoption rate for both platforms—87.3% for Twitter and 94.7% for Facebook. Senate Republicans also had higher adoption rates than their Democratic counterparts with 83% of Senate Republicans adopting Twitter and 80.9% adopting Facebook. In contrast, House Democrats had an 80% adoption rate for Twitter and a 90% adoption rate for Facebook and Senate Democrats had a 78% adoption rate for Twitter and a 77% adoption rate for Facebook.

How Much Are Twitter and Facebook Being Used?

During the two-month study, the observed Members sent a total of 30,765 Tweets and posted 16,239 times on Facebook, for an average of over 504 Member Tweets and 266 Member Facebook posts per day. Senators averaged more Tweets and Facebook posts per day (1.51 and 0.68, respectively) than their House counterparts (1.18 and 0.61, respectively).

[24] Comparisons are for Twitter only. Earlier CRS studies did not evaluate Facebook.

[25] CRS Report R41066, *Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Month Period in the 111th Congress*, by Matthew Eric Glassman, Jacob R. Straus, and Colleen J. Shogan; and Jacob R. Straus, Matthew Eric Glassman, Colleen J. Shogan, and Susan Navarro Smelcer, "Communicating in 140 Characters or Less: Congressional Adoption of Twitter in the 111th Congress," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 46, no. 1 (January 2013), pp. 60-66.

House Republicans Tweeted a plurality of Tweets (48%) and a majority of Facebook posts (54%) over the study period. This was followed by House Democrats, who accounted for 29% of Tweets and 27% of Facebook posts. Senate Republicans Tweeted and issued Facebook posts more often than Senate Democrats. Senate Republicans accounted for 11% of Tweets (compared to 10% for Senate Democrats) and for 12% of Facebook posts (compared to 7% for Senate Democrats). Independent Senators accounted for 2% of Tweets and 1% of Facebook posts.

While total percentage of Tweets and Facebook posts by chamber and party provides an interesting snapshot of congressional social media usage, the disparity in the number of Members in the Senate (100) vis-a-vis the House (441)—including the delegates and the Resident Commissioner—make for an uneven comparison. To normalize the analysis, **Table 1** shows the average number of posts per day by chamber and party affiliation.

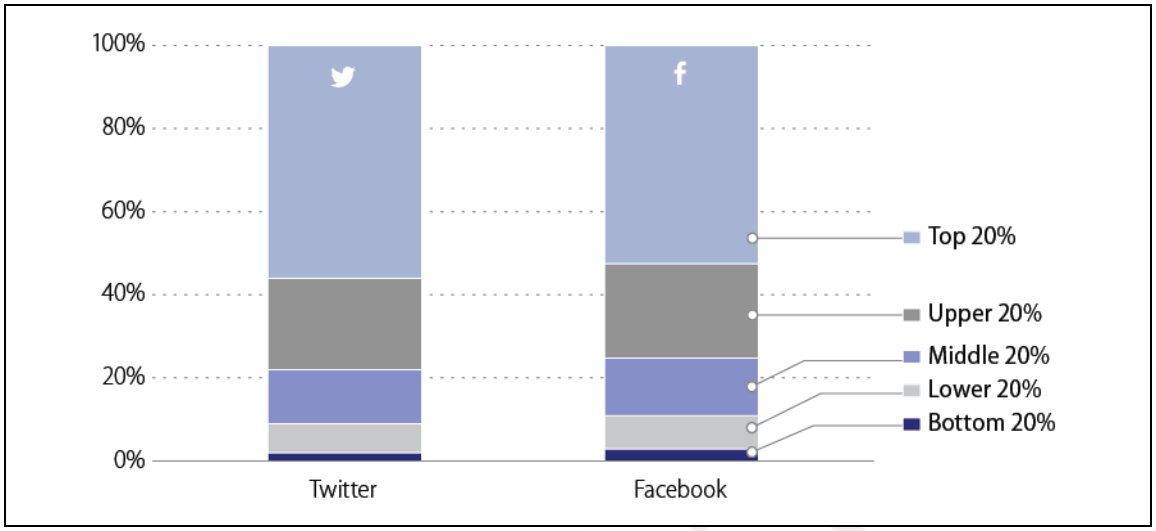
Table 1. Average Posts Per Day per Registered Member

	Facebook	Twitter
Congress	0.63	1.24
House	0.61	1.18
Senate	0.68	1.51
Republicans	0.73	1.28
Democrats	0.49	1.18
House Republicans	0.71	1.23
House Democrats	0.48	1.09
Senate Republicans	0.84	1.53
Senate Democrats	0.53	1.49

Source: LBJ School of Public Affairs and CRS data analysis.

Usage rates of both platforms varied significantly. The top 20% of Members who use Twitter (86 Members) accounted for over 56% of all Member Tweets. Similarly, the top 20% of Members who use Facebook (87 Members) accounted for over 53% of all Facebook posts. Conversely, the bottom 20% of Member users accounted for just 2% and 3% of Member Tweets and Facebook posts, respectively. **Figure 3** shows the distribution of total posts by quintiles of users for both Twitter and Facebook.

Figure 3. Total Posts by Quintiles of Users



Source: LBJ School of Public Affairs and CRS data analysis.

Figure 3 shows that the Members who use social media most often issue more than half of all congressional social media communications. In Congress, social media messaging is disproportionally utilized by a small group of Members. It also suggests that there is variation in *how* Members use social media as part of their overall public communications strategy. A Member who Tweets, on average, more than 10 times per day may not only be using Twitter for different purposes than a Member who only Tweets a few times each week, but also may view Twitter differently within the context of his or her overall communications style.

What Are Members Tweeting and Posting About?

To assess the content of Member Tweets and Facebook posts, seven major message categories were created following an examination of Tweets and Facebook posts sent by Members during the study: position taking, district or state, official congressional action, policy statement, media, personal, and other.[26] Each observed Member Tweet and Facebook post was coded into as many categories as was appropriate. For example, a post could be categorized as both "Official Congressional Action" and "Position Taking" if the post mentioned a vote and a position on a bill or "Media," "Position Taking," and "District or State" if the post or Tweet mentioned media, a position, and a state or constituent service related issue. A Tweet or post, however, could not be categorized as both position-taking and a policy statement, as the categories are mutually exclusive.

Position Taking and Official Congressional Action

[26] These seven categories constitute one plausible way to examine the data collected from Twitter and Facebook; other categories may also be defensible. These seven categories, however, are differentiable from each other, and capture all the Tweets issued during this time period. Selected Tweets are used for illustrative purposes only and are not intended to suggest any policy position by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

> Last week, I spoke on the floor in support of H.R. 2218, #edreform bill to improve #ESEA #NCLB. WATCH.[27]
>
> *Position Taking, District or State, and Media*
>
> Continue to push Obama Administration on Arctic energy projects. Good talk today with EPA R-10 on OCS and NPR-A.[28]

The categories were defined as follows:

Position Taking

Tweets or Facebook posts in which a Representative or Senator took a position on a policy or political issue. The expressed position could concern a specific bill under consideration or a general policy issue.

> In September, the Obama Administration rolled out 338 final rules of red tape at a cost of $10 billion. What happened to his promise to cut red tape?[29]
>
> Finally, the misguided Don't Ask, Don't Tell officially ends today. In December 2010, while making the case to repeal DADT, I shared the story of a gay soldier ... who has had to hide who he is for more than 20 years.[30]

District or State

Tweets or Facebook posts in which a Representative or Senator discussed a trip, visit, or event in a home district or state. Tweets might include invitations for Tweet recipients to attend town hall meetings or events in the state or district.

> Delivering opening remarks for Tribal Unity Impact Week hosted by the National Congress of American Indians.[31]
>
> Join me tomorrow at 6 PM in #Fairfield for a Town Hall focused on creating #JobsNow.[32]

Official Congressional Action

Tweets or Facebook posts in which a Representative or Senator described or recounted an official congressional action. For example, a Member might Tweet about a roll call vote, or discuss participation in a committee hearing or recent trip abroad.

> Headed down to the House floor to speak about the need for #jobs in WNY. Watch LIVE:[33]

[27] http://twitter.com, September 12, 2011.

[28] http://twitter.com, September 9, 2011.

[29] http://facebook.com, October 12, 2011.

[30] http://facebook.com, September 20, 2011.

[31] http://facebook.com, October 11, 2011.

[32] http://twitter.com, October 18, 2011.

[33] http://twitter.com, September 14, 2011.

> I attended the Unmanned Systems Caucus technology fair today. This is an industry with real potential in ... NY.[34]

Policy Statement

Tweets or Facebook posts in which a Representative or Senator references a public policy without taking a position. In this context, public policy means any topic that would be of interest to Congress.

> Reports say the President is offering significant spending cuts, he should share the plan w/ the American people tinyurl.com/3vgsm94[35]

> The Washington Post has a chart illustrating how President Obama proposes to pay for the American Jobs Act.[36]

Media

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator provided information about an upcoming media appearance or included a link to another website, such as a newspaper, blog, video, or official press release. All Tweets with a web-link were coded in this category.

> I'm quoted in a Portsmouth Daily Times news report on possible USEC layoffs if the Department of Energy doesn't OK a conditional loan.[37]

> Check out my Labor Day op-ed piece on the need for new job creation efforts here at home.[38]

Personal

Tweets or Facebook posts in which a Representative or Senator discussed events in his or her personal life or provided opinions concerning matters that were explicitly unrelated to work in Congress.

> #Rangers start off strong in 5th game of #ALSC playoff ! #BeatDET.[39]

> Great meeting with the pres. of my alma mater. Go Cardinal![40]

Other

These are entries that do not adequately fit in the other seven categories.

[34] http://twitter.com, September 21, 2011.

[35] http://twitter.com, July 7, 2011.

[36] http://facebook.com, September 13, 2011.

[37] http://facebook.com, October 5, 2011.

[38] http://twitter.com, September 15, 2011.

[39] http://facebook.com, October 14, 2011.

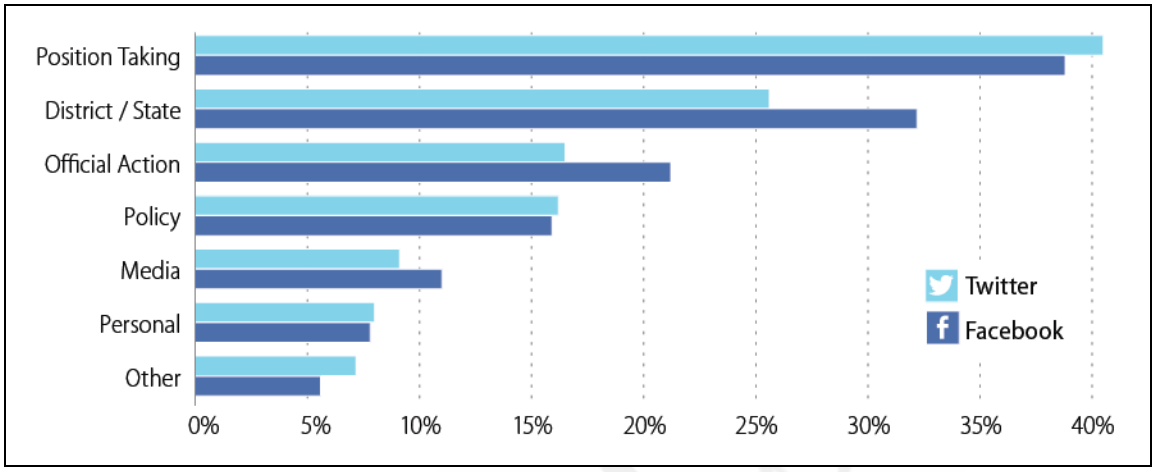
[40] http://twitter.com, October 4, 2011.

great to see everyone here![41]

Happy Constitution Day![42]

Figure 4 reports the number of Member Tweets and Facebook posts by category.

Figure 4. Tweets and Facebook Posts by Category



Source: LBJ School of Public Affairs and CRS data analysis.

Notes: A Tweet or post, however, could not be categorized as both position-taking and a policy statement, as the categories are mutually exclusive.

As shown in **Figure 4**, the most common Member Tweets and Facebook posts were "position-taking" posts. These comprised 41% of all Member Tweets and 39% of all Member Facebook posts. The next most common category was district or state Tweets and posts. These accounted for 26% of all Tweets and 32% of all Facebook posts. These were followed by official action (17% of Tweets and 21% of Facebook posts), and policy statements (16% of Tweets and 16% of Facebook posts).

Concluding Remarks

The use of Twitter and Facebook by Members of Congress is an evolving phenomenon. As Members continue to embrace new technologies, their use of Twitter, Facebook, and other forms of social media may increase. These mediums allow Members to communicate directly with constituents (and others) in a potentially interactive way that is not possible through mail or e-mail. For Members and their staff, the ability to collect and transmit real time information to and from constituents could be influential for issue prioritization, policy decisions, or voting behavior.

Further research on how the adoption and use of social media platforms—such as Twitter and Facebook—could provide insight into changing approaches to representation, messaging to constituents, communications outside a Member's district or state, and potential regulation.

[41] http://twitter.com, November 1, 2011.

[42] http://facebook.com, September 17, 2011.

Traditionally, Members represent a geographic constituency. Social media, however, provides Members with an "additional tool for contacting the geographic constituency, but ... also ... to reach groups outside of their official jurisdiction who share ideological goals and priorities."[43] Subsequently, while Members represent a geographic district, social media could allow "surrogate representation"[44] by Members of other non-geographic constituent groups. The consequences of such representation are not known, but could alter the representational strategies of individual Members within Congress.

As part of representation, Members not only represent a geographic constituency, but they are also concerned with their personal message and how it impacts reelection efforts.[45] While official Member communication cannot include campaign rhetoric, Members know that what they say on official social media channels can be used in elections.[46] Subsequently, how Members use social media continues to evolve. Some reports have suggested that Members are dedicating additional staff (or hiring new staff) to handle social media as part of their messaging and communications strategy.[47] In the current budget climate, how Members allocate staff is crucial. If Members are spending more resources on social media, it is possible that the priorities of other representational functions may change.

Electronic communications have also raised some concerns. While a complete discussion of this is beyond the scope of this report, a few observations warrant mentioning. First, existing law and chamber regulations on the use of communication media such as the franking privilege have proven difficult to adapt to the new electronic technologies. Currently, House regulations treat social media communications similarly to solicited franked mail. But several key differences between electronic communications and franked mail—most notably the lack of marginal cost, the inability to differentiate between constituents and non-constituents, and the ability of campaign challengers to adopt identical applications—raise questions about both the suitability and necessity of applying the franking model to social media communications.

Second, the use of electronic communications is rapidly changing, sometimes over the course of just months. Just 10 years ago, Facebook and Twitter did not exist. There is no way to predict whether they will continue to enjoy their current popularity 10 years from now, or what future communications tools and applications will exist. Policymakers thus may choose to seek general rather than specific structures when considering social media regulation, to avoid the need to revisit policies as new technologies are developed.

[43] Straus, Glassman, Shogan, and Smelcer, 2013, p. 64.

[44] Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 4 (2003), pp. 515-528.

[45] David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

[46] Jacob R. Straus, "Use of 'Dear Colleague' Letters in the US House of Representatives: A Study of Internal Communications," *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2013), p. 64.

[47] Congressional Management Foundation, "How Capitol Hill is Coping With a Surge in Citizen Advocacy," at http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cwc_capitolhillcoping.pdf.

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