

An Analysis of Discussion of the Green New Deal Amongst Twitter Users

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Introduction:

The importance of Twitter in facilitating the discussion of sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues has grown substantially since its inception. Retweets and hashtags, once introduced, began to radically change how people interacted with the platform. Where before one's reach was limited to only those who followed them, there was now potential for widespread dissemination of tweets. Virality was born. Activists and average users alike took to Twitter to give their views on the day's most pressing problems and work to raise awareness and promote solutions; trending hashtags are contributed to and seen by millions of people. As such, Twitter users are constantly communicating about topics with substantial importance to society; most recently, these topics range from #COVID and #masks to #BlackLivesMatter and #DefundThePolice.

Environmental activists have long utilized Twitter to give information about the climate and share their work. In this paper, the hashtag #GreenNewDeal will be analyzed. The Green New Deal is a package of legislation that aims to bring radical changes to the United States' economy while transitioning to a carbon-neutral society. The proposal has ambitious goals and seeks to "provide all Americans with high-quality health care, to guarantee them jobs with good wages and to meet 100 percent of their power demands through clean energy" (Clement and Grandoni, 2019). This level of change will require significant amounts of resources and public approval.

An integral piece of the Green New Deal is its attempt to tackle many issues: environmental damage, wage inequality, clean energy, and social justice. There is a strong effort to make the Green New Deal international in scope and hope to rectify the wrongs that other areas of the world have experienced as a result of colonialism and capitalism (Paul, 2020). While the global south is most likely to be severely adversely impacted by the coming climate change,

the region contributes to global CO₂ emissions at a proportion much lower than the western countries and others of the global north (Paul, 2020). Within the U.S., lower income areas are also more likely to face increasing damages from climate change and are already battling socioeconomic inequalities and injustices.

It is clear that sweeping, intense change is required to provide a sustainable future for both the planet and our economies. However, the major obstacle that the deal faces is its cost. The proposed legislation will cost exceedingly large amounts of money, with the dollars required looming in the trillions. Staggering costs have turned many Americans away from the idea, including U.S. Senator Todd Young (R-Ind.), who writes that “The Green New Deal is unaffordable, unattainable and unrealistic... this unaffordable plan would bankrupt our country...” (Young, 2019). Naturally, the bill has sparked discussion throughout the nation that is reflected on Twitter. This essay will analyze a subset of 100 tweets under the hashtag #GreenNewDeal to better understand how the activism and communication surrounding it takes form on the social media platform.

Methods:

A method of collecting tweets was necessarily to obtain the corpus to be interpreted. “TAGS” was utilized to create a self-running Google spreadsheet that pulled in tweets using the hashtag. The spreadsheet pulled in over ten thousand tweets, so filtering was necessary to be able to efficiently analyze and draw conclusions. A filter removing all retweets from the corpus was established that drastically reduced the number of tweets to sift through. The one hundred most recent tweets after filtering were used for research. Though not randomized, the data provides pertinent information that led to interesting conclusions.

After filtering and selecting tweets, they were coded. Coding tweets is an intensive process that requires the researcher to effectively garner information from them and subsequently categorize them into multiple subcategories. To draw complete conclusions, it is necessary to closely read tweets, links attached to tweets, and a few of the user's other tweets to establish a thorough understanding of the rationale behind the tweet and its purpose. Eight categories were used: appeal (ethos, logos, or pathos), purpose, type of communication, stance on the Green New Deal, motivator (rationale behind the tweet), user political leaning, related topics, and geographical location. Nearly all of the tweets could be coded, with the exception of some that were not written in English or that were composed solely of hashtags and tagging other accounts. A few tweets were just the hashtag and an attached link; interpretation of the link gave rise to the ability to interpret the rationale behind the tweet.

Data Analysis:

Compiling the data using single column charts and pivot tables provided a means to tease out qualitative data from the corpus of tweets. A key driving force in rhetoric is the appeal the writer uses, either ethos, logos, or pathos.

Somewhat surprisingly, all three were fairly evenly distributed (as seen in Figure 1).

Almost all of the tweets employing ethos gave credibility to a politician. Many of the tweets utilizing a logos appeal gave information or statistics, or a date of an

event. Logos was also used to build arguments by providing logic. Pathos tweets used emotion to make the plea for a Green New Deal; examples include tweets stating that clean water is a

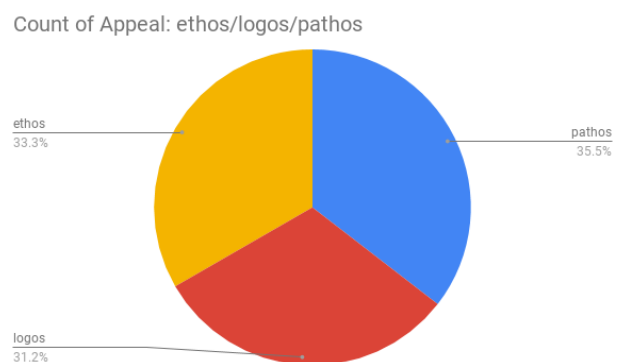


Figure 1

human right, that the link between racism and climate change is real and strengthening, and that we must do better to save our planet and our people. It can be seen from this chart that all three appeals were used to strengthen users’ rhetoric.

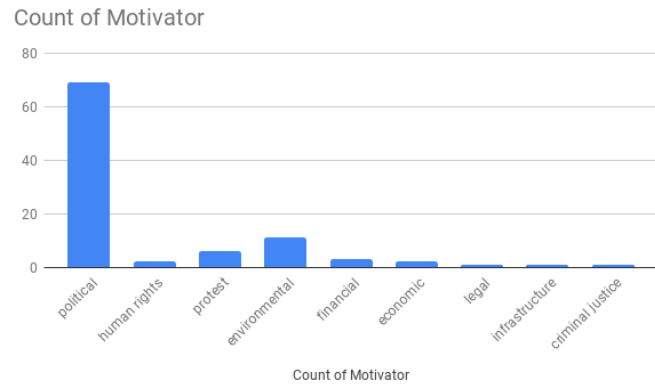


Figure 2

In Figure 2, it can be easily seen that the motivator, or rationale, behind the vast majority of tweets was political in nature; this code included tweets that discussed a political candidate or politician, policy, etc. Environmental rationale took a distant second, with other rationales like protest, economic, and financial following it.

Figure 3 displays the purposes of the corpus of tweets: what they sought to do, what they wanted to accomplish, why they existed, etc. The majority of the sample sought to advocate for the cause or inform others about it. Promotion tweets were included in this category and usually

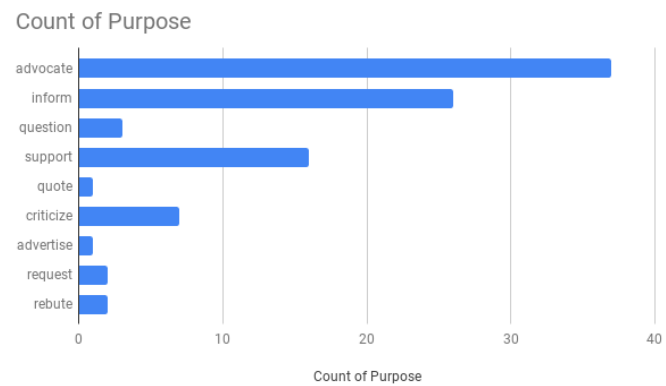


Figure 3

occurred in tandem with ethos, as users promoted a political candidate or politician. Support differed from advocate in that the tweet did not have a discrete call to action. Criticism was mostly seen in the context of critiquing politicians, including Presidential Candidate Joe Biden, rather than criticizing the legislation itself in the corpus. One such example is a tweet by @AlexAmbitio, who wrote “@JoeBiden you are such a hypocrite. You oppose the #GreenNewDeal so this is just more of your empty lies and rhetoric.” Figure 4 shows how the

appeal of a tweet correlated with the related topic, including progressivism, racial justice, political criticism, political issues, environmental, recovery, conservatism, etc. It is clear that ethos is correlated strongly with political issues, and pathos is correlated strongly with progressivism or otherwise progressive ideals. Logos resides squarely in the middle, as logic is apt to do. Figure 5 shows the correlation between the user’s political leaning and their stance on the Green New Deal. The results are not surprising, with every left leaning user favoring the legislation and the only right leaning user in the corpus being against the legislation. Lastly, figure 6 shows the geographical location of those in the corpus who reported their location. The regions are divided amongst the U.S. and around the world. The vast majority of those tweeting were in America, with the highest concentration in the northeast. The pacific region was the second; this data closely follows general political trends in the country, with the northeast and west coast being much more liberal. Overall, the global north dominated the corpus.

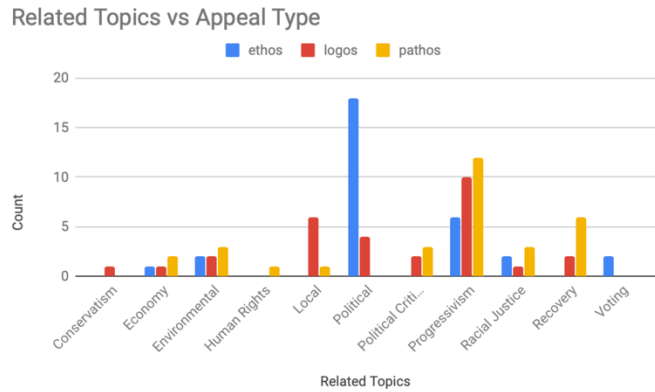


Figure 4

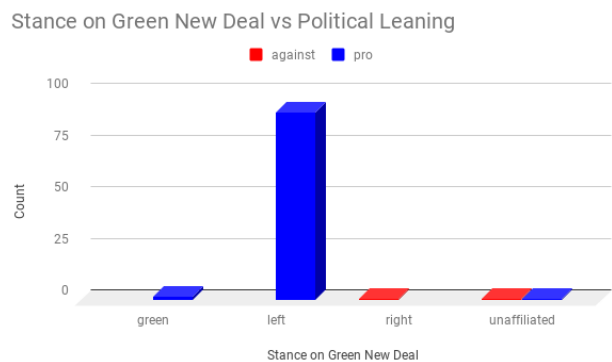


Figure 5

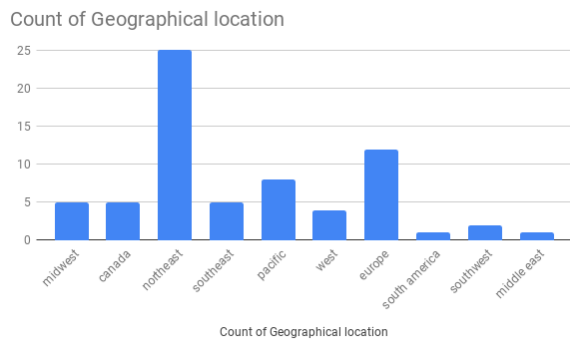


Figure 6

Discussion:

Twitter facilitates and perpetuates discussion through the layout and functionality of its platform. Some activists target the federal level, some target state level, and some target local levels. A tweet by @matthewallenma states “Massachusetts needs a #GreenNewDeal. Pass it on,” and links an article discussing why. This supports the claim that activists are turning toward individual states to build support for a Green New Deal as a result of federal-level roadblocks (Daigneau, 2019). The Green New Deal was introduced in 2018 and most Americans had little idea of what it contained; however, once they did, positive and negative opinions on the bill quickly separated across party lines. This can be seen in the data in Figure 5 and is corroborated by a study that aimed to show how, with increasing exposure to the bill, Americans became polarized in stance (Gustafson et al., 2019). Racial justice, equality, and equity are major goals of the deal; user @cwpontwit wrote “The links between racism and climate change: Activists, writers, and journalists examine two of the major crises of the moment. #BlackLivesMatter #GreenNewDeal ...” and linked the associated article.

Conclusion:

The #GreenNewDeal tagged tweets in this corpus provide a case study of a microcosm of the greater discussions being had about the topic. Out of 100 tweets, less than 3 were found to be against the deal; this could potentially be a result of response bias, where only those that feel most strongly about a topic will go through the effort to tweet about it. The low number of opposing tweets is largely not representative of the greater U.S. populace; the deal is a hard sell for many. Though no back-and-forth discussions were found in this corpus, it was very beneficial to analyze the supportive tweets to develop a better understanding of how they are structured, their goals, and what they can do for their cause.

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