4 Telltale Signs of Propaganda on Twitter

MIKE TERRAZAS
COLLEGE OF COMPUTING

As Election Day 2012 draws nearer, the “Twitterverse” promises to light up again and again with explosions of political opinion. But which tweets are the genuinely expressed feelings of individual users and which are systematic disseminations of information meant to support or discredit an idea — the textbook definition of “propaganda?”

A new study from the School of Computer Science calls such patterns of communication “hyperadvocacy.” The study identifies four characteristic behaviors of Twitter hyperadvocates, whose actions clearly separate them from the tweeting behavior of typical users. Associate Professor Nick Feamster directed the study, working with former postdoctoral researcher Cristian Lumezanu and Associate Professor Hans Klein of the School of Public Policy.

The study examined tweets from two recent politically charged U.S. events: the 2010 U.S. Senate race in Nevada and the 2011 debate over raising the U.S. debt ceiling. Collecting tweets that used the hashtags #nvsen and #debtceiling, the researchers were able to gather approximately 80 percent of all tweets on those issues during the time frame under study.

From a data set of nearly 100,000 tweets for the two issues combined, Feamster and his colleagues identified the following behaviors that characterize propagandistic activities on Twitter by users on both sides of the partisan aisle:

- Sending high volumes of tweets over short periods of time.
- Retweeting while publishing little original content.
- Quickly retweeting others’ content.
- Coordinating with other, seemingly unrelated users to send duplicate or near-duplicate messages on the same topic simultaneously.

“As social media become more and more ingrained in our culture, and as people use social media more as a source of information about the world, it’s important to know the provenance of that information — where it’s coming from and whether it can be trusted,” Feamster said. “As a user, you might think the information you see is coming from lots of different sources, but in fact it can be part of an orchestrated campaign.”

Indeed, the very aspect of Twitter that makes it appear less amenable to traditional propaganda also makes it difficult for its users to disambiguate between fact and fiction.

President Welcomes New Freshman Class to Campus

Enthusiasm for pursuing an undergraduate education at Georgia Tech has never been greater. This week we will welcome the first group of freshmen to FASET as part of what is shaping up to be our best and most diverse freshman class in Tech’s history.

In all likelihood, it will also be our largest. While I’m sure there are many reasons, I cannot help but wonder if our prospective students and their parents are reading the national media reports, such as Bloomberg Businessweek and Payscale.com, that rank a Georgia Tech education as one of the best in terms of “return on investment” in the country.

As many of you know, the process by which we “build” our freshman class is based in part on statistical analysis, part on historical trends and part
TEC Camp Inspires Future Female Engineers

AMELIA PAVLIK
COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

Making physics and aeronautics concepts as interesting as the “Hunger Games” trilogy or the latest smartphone app is one of the challenges that Hernando Jimenez enjoys most about working with Georgia Tech’s TEC Camp.

“It can be intimidating,” said Jimenez, a research engineer in the School of Aerospace Engineering, who has been an instructor for the camp since 2008. “But it’s very rewarding to observe campers having fun and becoming genuinely intrigued about the different concepts they are learning while putting them into practice. It is also rewarding to see them realize that mathematics is not beyond them and that they can in fact be quite successful at it.”

The camp was created in 2001 by the Women in Engineering Program at Tech to provide middle school-aged girls with an opportunity to come to campus for a week and engage in hands-on engineering and computing activities.

This year’s camp welcomed 40 razing seventh and eighth graders. The girls were split into teams of 10, with each team being guided throughout the week by two junior counselors (high school-aged girls who are program alums) and senior counselors (female engineering students at Tech).

Each day, the girls took part in hands-on classes focusing on topics such as aerospace engineering, chemical engineering, with design, acoustics, transportation engineering and presentation skills. The camp classes are taught by Tech professors, graduate students and women from the community who work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

In addition to the classes, fun activities such as a luncheon with an undergraduate student panel, a picnic and outdoor games and a celebration dinner at the end of the week, which parents are invited to, are also sprinkled into the schedule each year.

“The girls really seem to enjoy the variety of hands-on, interactive activities they participate in,” said Ann Blasick, associate director of Women in Engineering. “Of course, they also enjoy getting to know the engineering students and faculty, as well as one another.”

This was the first year Juandaly Richards, a school technology specialist for Fulton County Schools, sent her daughter, 13-year-old Zharia, to the camp.

“She’s already told me that she wants to be a biomedical engineer,” Richards said. “This camp allows our young daughters the opportunity to gain exposure to engineering and the many opportunities that exist for women.

Registration for the 2013 camp will open in February and can be completed at www.coe.gatech.edu/wie. The cost to attend the camp is $250.

For more information, contact Blasick at ann.blasick@coe.gatech.edu.

www.coe.gatech.edu/wie

Zharia, one of the campers attending this year’s TEC Camp, prepares to launch the rocket that she built during a class led by Hernando Jimenez.

Throughout the summer, The Whistle is highlighting various Georgia Tech camps for children and teens. In the next issue: the Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics and Computing’s Summer P.E.A.K.S. camps.

EVENTS

TECHNOLOGY

Conference and Lectures

July 17

The Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI) presents the Second FalconView® Symposium, “Geospatial Situation Awareness for Office Professionals.” To register, visit the Landon Learning Center.

August 8

Professor William Whitney presents “ Granite City Industry Report: The Emerging Solar Industry.” To register, visit the Landon Learning Center.

TRAINING

July 11

A course open to employees on bloodborne pathogens will be offered at 10:30 a.m. in the Environmental Health and Safety Conference Room. To register, visit www.train.gatech.edu.

July 12

A course open to employees on CPR/AED/first aid training will be offered at 8:30 a.m. in room 240, Campus Recreation Center. To register, visit www.train.gatech.edu.

July 18

A defensive driving course will be offered at 8:30 a.m. in room 320, Student Center. To register, visit www.train.gatech.edu.

July 24

A course open to employees on general biosafety will be offered at 1 p.m. in the Environmental Health and Safety Conference Room. To register, visit www.train.gatech.edu.

August 3

A course on the foundations of diversity awareness for office professionals will be offered at 8:30 a.m. in room 203, Savant Building. To register, visit www.train.gatech.edu.

August 9

A course on gender diversity in the workplace will be offered at 8:30 a.m. in room 320, Student Center. To register, visit www.train.gatech.edu.

DALLAS CAMPUS

July 17

The GTRI’s Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics and Computing’s summer P.E.A.K.S. camps begin.

July 23

“Humans of the Digital Age,” a workshop for students ages 14-17, will be held at the GTRI Conference Center.

JULY 24

A lunchtime event will be held at the GTRI Conference Center.

EVENTS

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www.whistle.gatech.edu

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Students Chronicle their Summer Experiences

Kris ten Shaw
Communications & Marketing

As summer continues, it means fewer students roaming the paths of campus in favor of spending time studying abroad, working or interning.

And thankfully, a few are willing to blog about their summer experiences from whatever corner of the world they’ve chosen as home for the next couple months. Their tales may not have all the allure of great summer blockbusters, but they will come back regularly with more instead of leaving you after two hours.

• Connor Zentz (http://czentz.tumblr.com): Third-year undergraduate mechanical engineering major Connor Zentz is spending his summer in Metz, France, at Georgia Tech Lorraine. Cheese and wine tastings intermingle with academics in this 11-week program at Tech’s French campus.

• I Am Liberal Arts (http://sammiliberalarts.tumblr.com): As students and faculty of the Ivan Allen College student contributors highlights the many ways liberal arts students spend their summers. More than a dozen students chronicle their activities in Peru, Atlanta, England, Illinois and beyond.

• Invention Studio (http://inventionstudio.tumblr.com): The Invention Studio maintains its blog year-round, but万辆 students groups, continues to be active during the summer. This group of students operates out of the School of Mechanical Engineering and posts photos of its inspiring creations.

• Real College Student of Atlanta (http://www.rcsoatl.com): Fourth-year science, technology and culture major Viett Vandiver writes about the many things to love about Atlanta, exploring its various fashion, dining and entertainment opportunities.

• Study Abroad Program (http://gsb10.blogspot.hu): Not limited to studying, students in Hungary this summer will also be interning at companies and organizations while abroad. How does a nonprofit raise funds in Hungary differently from the United States? Learn through these students’ experiences as they navigate the role of an intern across the ocean.

• Techies Roving Internationally (http://gtirips.wordpress.com): If you’d like to focus exclusively on the international experience, this group of bloggers and President’s Scholars tell their audience about travels and studies around the world. Italy, France, Germany and Czech Republic are among the many places this group is exploring throughout the summer. For more Tech-related blogs, visit http://gatech.edu/blogs.

ADVANCE Program Announces Equity Initiative

Georgia Tech’s ADVANCE Program has announced a new initiative that is meant to promote more equitable practices when it comes to faculty advancement at the Institute.

“The ADVANCE Program seeks to increase the participation of women in science and engineering by increasing their representation and advancement in academia; there is an ADVANCE professor based in each of Tech’s colleges. The group suggested the creation of the Equity Program as part of its ongoing commitment to recruit and retain a diverse, world-class faculty at Tech.”

The program’s focus will be on fair processes for evaluating faculty members for advancement. Potential components of the program, which could be in place as early as Spring 2013, might include the following:

• A means to support awareness of equity such as equity advisors who would provide information and advice on practices that maximize the likelihood of recruitment, retention and the advancement of excellent and diverse faculty members.

• Clear and easily accessible procedures regarding evaluation procedures for reappointment, tenure and promotion.

• Focusing a discussion on equity at the annual department and school chairs orientation.

• A managed mentoring program for assistant professors and a launch committee for each new faculty member hired that would help successfully integrate the person into the institution and ensure a successful start.

“Other academic institution has approached institutional transformation as centrally as Tech has,” said Mary Frank Fox, ADVANCE professor in the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts and lead author of the 2012-2014 ADVANCE Plan that proposed the Equity Program. “The GT initiative was one of the very few, if not the only, ADVANCE initiative nationally that has addressed clarity and equity in evaluation. This is not a prescriptive formula for evaluation — but rather a focus on fair and transparent processes. Equity is an ongoing process that requires continuous attention and that is the impetus for this plan.”

In the fall, Tech’s ADVANCE professors will work with the college deans, focus groups comprised of faculty members, Brus and Vice President for Institute Diversity Archie Ervin to finalize the components of the program.

“The ADVANCE program and the new Equity Program are a new and integral step toward the institutionalization of fair processes, advancement and diversity of faculty,” Ervin said. “This is a critical part of Georgia Tech’s national leadership and status and competitiveness as a premier 21st century world leader in the advancement of faculty.”

ADVANCE Program Announces Equity Initiative

http://www.advance.gatech.edu

FRESHMAN CLASS, continued from page 1

on educated guesswork. Those of you with college-age children may remember your students applying to multiple universities and then making a decision based upon the schools that have accepted them. Knowing some will choose to attend elsewhere, for the newest members of our community, for they are our future. Thank you in advance for your assistance in showing our new freshmen the very best we here at Georgia Tech have to offer.

http://www.gatech.edu/commencement

For a more comprehensive listing of events updated daily, visit www.gatech.edu/calendar.

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Tell us about your research.

I design computer systems to assist people whose work requires them to make quick decisions. For example, right now I’m working on a program that simulates how pilots descend into Los Angeles International Airport, which will help the airport upgrade its air-traffic control system.

What is the most satisfying aspect of your research?

I work with researchers from a wide variety of fields, and while we all speak English, we have been trained to use a highly technical version of the language, which results in most of us not understanding each other. So the most satisfying part is when you can make yourself understood and feel like you can finally understand the other person’s position.

What have you learned from your students?

A lot of computer shortcuts. In class, I will sometimes struggle with getting things done on the computer, and one of my students will shout out a shortcut that I wasn’t aware of. It’s great.

If you weren’t in your current field, what would you be doing?

I’d probably be an economist.

What piece of technology could you not live without?

My laptop. I’d be worthless without it.

What’s the biggest risk you’ve taken, and did it pay off?

The risk involved hitchhiking in the Alps — and the fact that I’m still talking to you means that it did.

If you could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, who would it be and why?

My grandfather, because he died before I was old enough to get to know him.

When a unit volunteers to participate in the email exercise, representatives from the unit and OIT’s Office of Information Technology (OIT) will receive an email containing a list of recipients for a fake phishing email. If a person responds to the email with their username and password, he or she receives an immediate message to let them know that he or she had been an actual phishing attempt, “bad guys” would have the employee’s account information, Belford added.

“If you respond to the fake email and receive our response message, don’t worry — you won’t get in trouble,” Belford said. “We’re just trying to reach out to people who are confused about what emails are legitimate and which emails aren’t before it’s too late.”

Following the email exercise, information security also conducts a 15-minute training session with the unit’s faculty and staff that provides tools to help distinguish legitimate messages from phishing scams.

“The training has been very effective,” Belford said. “After training one particular unit, I even received a call about a phishing message a person had received. He was the first one to let us know and helped prevent others from possibly falling for it.”

To participate in this program, email ask.oit@tech.gatech.edu.

OIT Uses Fake Phishing Emails to Educate Campus

OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

You’ve probably seen the emails urging you to change your account settings. But have you ever wondered if it is a real email or a scam trying to get your information?

If you’ve felt this way, you’re not alone. In 2011, 165 Georgia Tech accounts were compromised by users providing their information to fraudulent messages.

That’s why the Office of Information Technology (OIT)’s information security team has come up with a creative way to educate the campus community.

“OIT is partnering with our units at Tech to educate faculty and staff about scam emails that seek to capture your personal information,” said Jason Belford, principal information security software engineer. “The information we’re sharing can be helpful to people when it comes to both their professional and personal email accounts.”

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