

Study on the British Elections on Twitter

29.06.2017

Interaction on Twitter During the United Kingdom General Election

Introduction

The general election took place in the United Kingdom on June 8. It was announced on 19 April 2017, proposed by Theresa May, leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

The Conservative Party already had an absolute majority, with 331 members (out of 650), so bringing forward the 2020 election was an attempt to extend that majority to have more freedom to negotiate the Brexit terms.

The aim of this report is to analyse the conversations that took place through the social network, Twitter, on Election Day.

Analysis of the Conversations

To analyse the conversations on Twitter, the various interactions of users are represented by means of a graph.

A graph consists of nodes and edges. In this case, each node represents a Twitter user and each edge represents interaction between two users (a mention, a *retweet* or a quote). An analysis of these interactions allows us to identify groups of users who interact with each other. These groups are called communities.

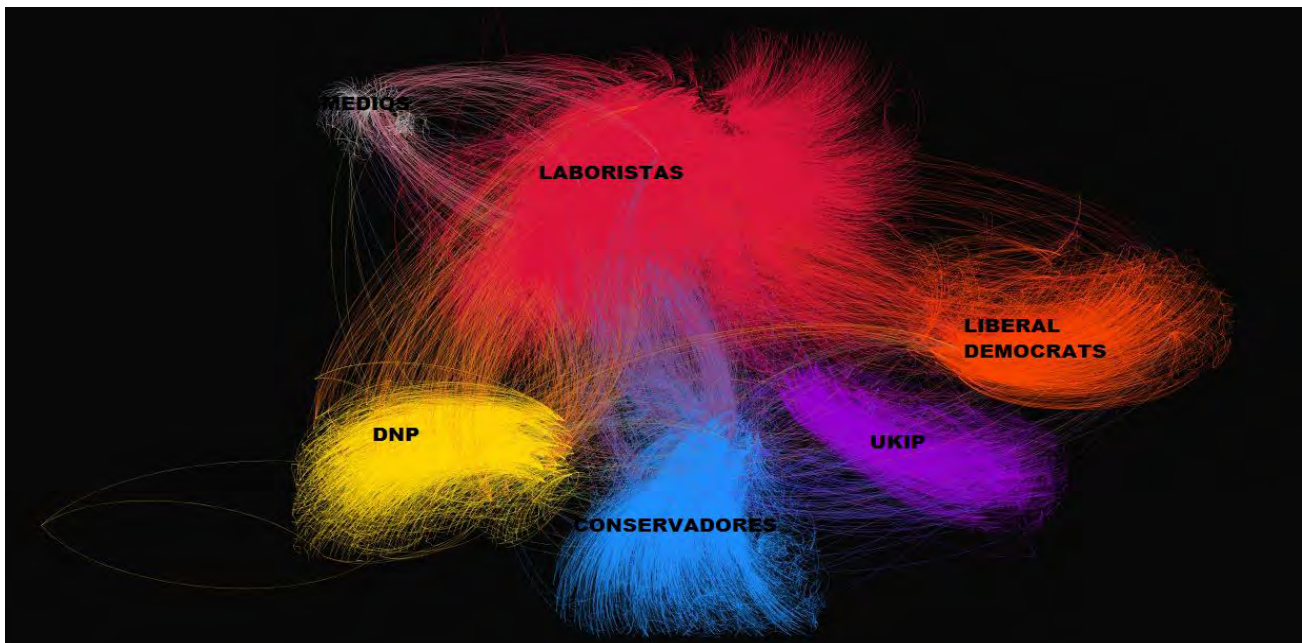


Figure 1. Conversations in Twitter on Election Day.

In the graph different communities that coincide with the different political ideologies stand out, along with a community consisting of the majority of the media (the grey community in the top left hand side).

A more detailed analysis of the interactions between users enables us to determine that the spread of information was carried out mainly through *retweets*, generating a lot of *noise*. In other words, many user profiles have interacted just once by retweeting another user's content, but not providing any new content of value to the conversation.

When these profiles are removed, a much clearer picture of which users are those with the most influence in the network is revealed.



Figure 2. Profiles with greater influence in the network.

In the picture above, the larger nodes are those that have had more influence during the conversation in that they have been the most mentioned, retweeted or quoted.

It is observed that the most active community on Election Day was related to the Labour Party, with its leader being the main protagonist throughout the network.

This coincides with the main profiles of each community being the official accounts of the parties and their respective leaders, whose main activity was asking people to vote for them.

In the Labour Party community many public figures, such as the Boxer Tony Bellew, who even announced his vote for Corbyn; or Dr. Lauren Gavaghan, who generated a lot of unique content mainly against Conservative Party cuts to the National Health Service.

Within the UKIP community, in addition to the profile of the party, the profile of @KTHopkins, belonging to the journalist Katie Hopkins stands out. This profile created unique content that generated a lot of interaction within her community, which mainly consisted of criticism of the two major parties. The interaction with her diminished as the day progressed, probably due to the loss of the UKIP's single seat.

Other Aspects to Highlight

There was a *bot* (an automatic account) detected in UKIP community, corresponding to the profile @Brexshit2017. Its activity was based on generating tweets mentioning the main leaders of the Labour and Conservative parties in the same content, but this content hardly generated any interaction from the rest of users in the network.

Also noteworthy was the amount of mentions that the profile @nhsmillion, the official of the National Health Service, received. Both labour supporters and conservative ones made reference to the same topic a great number of times. The first ones to criticise the cuts the Conservative Party had presented in their programme, while the conservatives, to a lesser extent, to defend them and to criticise the Labour Party programme.

On the other hand, the group formed by the media (grey community) is quite small with respect to the rest of the network, which means that despite the fact that they spent Election Day providing information, the repercussion within the network was minimal in comparison with the other main players. The media representatives which had the most interaction were The Sun, followed by the Daily Mail and the Daily Express. The main content generated by these media representatives was to report the possible ascent of the Labour Party as they were receiving results of polls on the streets.

Conclusions

Social networks provide a good gauge of public opinion. In addition, they are ideal to analyse the development of events in real time, such as in national elections.

On the other hand, the use of graphs to represent and analyse conversations facilitates the identification of relevant profiles and communities during the course of the conversation which would be very complex to implement in other analysis techniques.

Methodology and Tools

The monitoring data was obtained in six half-hour periods of monitoring distributed both throughout the morning and in the afternoon of Election Day.

The monitored terms were: *votelabour2017*, *generalelection2017*, *election day*, *voted*, *vote2017*.

The representation of the graph and the calculations were carried out using the GEPHI and R tools.

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