

Use of Microblogging to Share Crisis Information

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BACKGROUND

Social media tools such as microblogging allow citizens to create and share information almost instantaneously with a wide audience while bypassing official communication channels.

Twitter is the most popular microblogging site with approximately 100 million users

- Messages (tweets) are 140 characters in length
- Tweets often contain links to photographs, videos, text files, websites, blogs, and other sources
- Hashtags are a user-driven method for categorizing tweets about a specific topic with the # symbol.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the research study is to analyze the use of Twitter during a violent crisis.

Research questions :

- What types of content are transmitted over Twitter during a violent crisis?
- Who are the contributors to the communications sent over Twitter during a violent crisis?

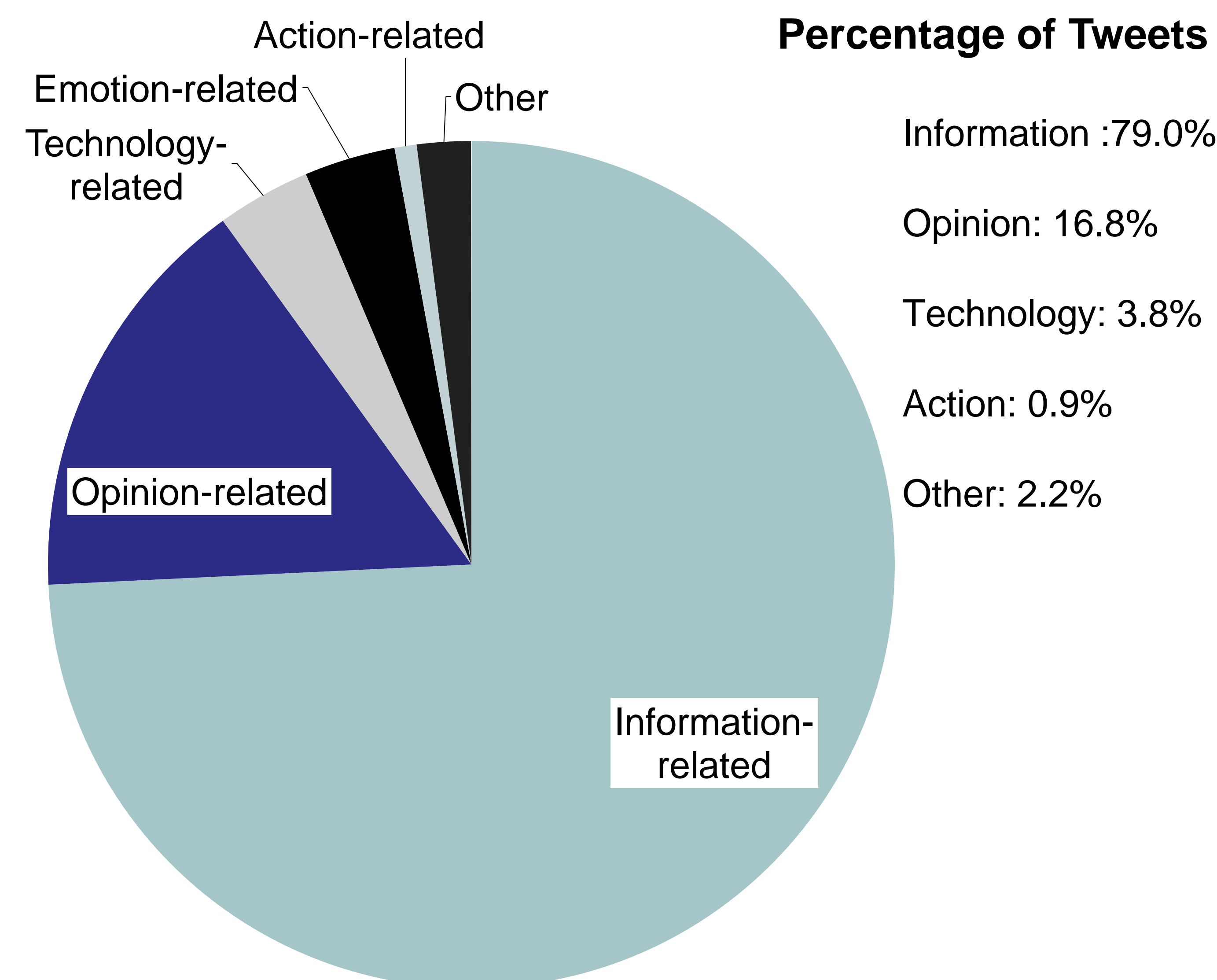
CASE STUDY

Four Seattle-Tacoma area police officers shot/killed by lone suspect on November, 29, 2009.

During the 48-hour search for suspect., the researchers observed that the #washooting hashtag became the dominant hashtag used during the crisis.

METHODS

Collected 6013 Twitter messages with the #washooting hashtag focused on the shooting/killing of four Seattle-Tacoma, Washington police officers in late November 2009. Qualitatively coded messages in five main categories: information, opinion, technology, emotion, and action-related. Coded author types as citizen, news media, public service agencies, and other.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Investigation is in progress to track sources used for information-related tweets and to analyze retweeted (redistributed word for word) content. The results of this study will lead to a better understanding of the potential uses of microblogging in sharing information during times of crisis.

RESULTS

- Information-related tweets dominated the content shared

Examples of information shared:

Photographs of suspect
License plate number of suspect's get-away car
Twitter/Facebook profiles of suspect
Previous legal/criminal history of suspect
Google Map of suspect sighting & police activity
Google Wave of search activities
Wikipedia entries of suspect and search

- Total unique authors: 1668. Majority of authors (91.5%) were citizens, followed by news media organizations (4.5%).
- Citizens contributed to majority of tweets (82.3%). followed by news media (12.3%).
- Public service agencies contributed to 0.18% of tweets.

CONCLUSIONS

In the case of the #washooting stream of Twitter messages, citizens dominated the communications. The majority of the messages consisted of crisis information content. Public service agencies had minimal participation in the #washooting conversation.