A Tweetstorm: Examining Tweets for Fake News following the Comey Hearings

ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of the term fake news on Twitter, as well as how the term was used in relation to political party and news source. The following study examined the first 1,500 chronological tweets ($N = 1,500$) related to fake news in the day after the testimony of former FBI Director James Comey in May 2017. The tweets were coded for 100 different key words, hashtags, references and atmospheric references related to fake news. The codes were used to determine the origin of tweets about fake news, the context of the tweets about fake news, and where those tweets landed on the American political spectrum. This study found that 62% of links in the sample of tweets for this study originated from explicitly right-leaning sources. The accusation of a source being fake news was overwhelmingly directed at either mainstream or left-leaning fake news sources (67% of the time). Additionally, 77.4% of tweets mentioning left wing parties also referred to them as fake as opposed to 46.0% of right wing parties. Most of the hashtags were coded to be anti-Trump than pro-Trump, but in relation to political party, there were more antiliberal tweets than anti-conservative. In regard to the sample of tweets in this study, there presents a disconnect between pro-conservative and pro-Trump suggesting the split between Trump and the GOP was evident on Twitter.