Giving and Philanthropy in the US
Analysis of discourse in news and social media
Project Purpose

Commissioned by the Philanthropic Partnerships Team at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, this work fills a gap in research describing and understanding conversations about giving and philanthropy that are taking place in the news and across social media in the United States.

Researchers from the Media Cloud project at the MIT Media Lab and the Media Ecosystems Analysis Group analyzed discourse within US news stories and Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram posts pertaining to giving and philanthropy.

Project Objectives

- Provide an overview of narratives about giving and philanthropy and the evolution of these narratives over time
- Identify promising and problematic narratives
- Analyze the public narrative around the role of philanthropists
- Detect specific moments or campaigns that shifted narratives
- Identify influential news sources, organizations, and individuals in media coverage and discussion about giving and philanthropy
Methodology

Data sources employed
1. Media Cloud, news media database. Targeted US publications and the websites these publications link to.
2. Crimson Hexagon, Twitter content analysis platform. Narrowed to Twitter users located in the US.
3. CrowdTangle, database of public Facebook and Instagram posts. (Not narrowed by geographic location.)

Search terms used to find content
• A complex query of keywords relating to charitable giving/philanthropy. The word “election” was removed to reduce the impact of political donation discussion.

Timeframe of content analyzed
• 1 year, content posted or published between 8/1/2017 and 8/1/2018.
How much discussion of giving/philanthropy took place in the news and on social media? What events and people drove this discussion?
Between 8/1/17 and 8/1/18:

- **News media**
  - 6K news publications and web domains published content containing giving/philanthropy keywords
  - 51K unique articles and website pages that contained giving/philanthropy keywords were published

- **Social media**
  - 48M Tweets were posted that contained giving/philanthropy keywords
  - 3M Facebook posts were made that contained giving/philanthropy keywords
  - 450K Instagram posts were made that contained giving/philanthropy keywords
Attention-over-time graphs plot the number of stories/posts per day with giving/philanthropy keywords for each medium

a. Peaks in coverage/discussion occurred in all four media types around Hurricane Harvey (Aug 2017)
b. Peaks in discussion on Facebook and Instagram occurred around Giving Tuesday (Nov 2017)
c. A smaller peak in coverage in news media and in discussion on Twitter occurred around the Las Vegas shooting (Oct 2017)
Which content producers drove news media coverage of giving/philanthropy?

- Publishers that featured the most articles with giving/philanthropy keywords:
  1. Washington Post
  2. Forbes
  3. USA Today
  4. New York Times
  5. FOX News

- Publishers whose giving/philanthropy content received the most Facebook shares:
  1. New York Times
  2. Huffington Post
  3. FOX News
  4. Washington Post
  5. CNN

- GoFundMe.com was the external website most frequently linked to in news media stories on giving/philanthropy
Who drove discussion of giving/philanthropy on social media?

• Celebrities
  • Singer Selena Gomez had the most-liked post about giving on Instagram
  • Music producer Marshmello had the most-liked post on Instagram for match giving, when he matched fellow producer Diplo’s donation to Las Vegas after the mass shooting
  • Actress Cara Delevingne had the most-liked #GivingTuesday post on Instagram

• Nonprofits
  • Charities the World Wildlife Fund UK, Sheldrick Wildlife Foundation, and the Make-a-Wish Foundation posted some of the most-liked posts on Facebook and Instagram related to #GivingTuesday

• Philanthropists
  • Strive Masiyiwa had the most-liked post about philanthropy/giving on Facebook
  • George Andrew Rose (CEO of Kennedy Center) was one of the most influential authors on Twitter in #GivingTuesday posts
What are the main narratives present in coverage and discussion of giving/philanthropy?
Top words in news media content
- The word cloud shows the most frequently used words in news articles that also contain giving/philanthropy keywords.
Top words in Tweets

- The following word cloud shows the most frequently used words in Tweets that also contain giving/philanthropy keywords.
The following word cloud shows the most frequently used hashtags in Facebook posts that also contain giving/philanthropy keywords.

- Limited to the first hashtag per post.
Top hashtags in Instagram posts

- The following word cloud shows the most frequently used hashtags in Instagram posts that also contain giving/philanthropy keywords.
- Limited to the first hashtag per post.
PROMISING Narratives

Narratives that leave the reader with a positive view of giving/philanthropy, possibly empowering readers to donate

• The power of crowdfunding
  • People can have impact by joining together, including the ability to right wrongs and address larger powers

• Regular people helping in small ways
  • Small donations and everyday civic actions can have impact

• Regular people helping in big ways
  • Heroes who go above and beyond in their charitable actions or philanthropy
  • Exceptional charity following a disaster or a shooting

• Donating as part of a healthy lifestyle
  • Explanation of the scientific benefits of altruism
  • Family/“mommy” bloggers setting philanthropic example as part of efforts towards simplification and meaning-making

Example post from “Regular people helping in big ways” narrative
MIXED Narratives

Narratives that are heavily context-dependent, such that reader reaction will likely be based on pre-existing political/social views

- Celebrity charity
  - Apolitical causes (disaster relief, veterans) are generally positive, while involvement in more political causes is discussed more negatively
  - Sports stars were the most commonly discussed (e.g., Colin Kaepernick, JJ Watts)

- Corporate donations
  - Donations usually followed disasters, and social media reactions were generally mixed

- Philanthropists and their gifts
  - Framing is often straight news; reaction will be based on whether reader supports the cause
  - Emerging narrative displayed in “Winners Take All” and similar work takes a critical look at ultra-high net worth philanthropists

- Regular people asking for money
  - Co-opting of term "donate" to also mean pay for someone else’s expenses
  - Most requests are for health care or animals

Example posts from “Corporate donations” narrative

@nestbedding wanted to say you guys are awesome for donating money to help the people affected by Hurricane Harvey! You guys just earned a new customer 💚
— lex 🌐(@LexusSimonson) Aug 30, 2017

Disappointed to see so many companies trying to increase sales using the "donating a portion of profits to hurricane relief" strategy. Ugh
10:59 AM - Sep 1, 2017

Francesca Zavacky @fzavacky

PROBLEMATIC Narratives

Narratives that leave the reader with a negative view of giving/philanthropy, thereby fostering cynicism about donating

• Hypocritical donors
  • Coverage of people with misconduct exposed who are identified as donors/philanthropists; Harvey Weinstein is prominent example

• Untrustworthy charities, fundraising scams
  • Exposure of a corrupt charity or fundraising effort; Red Cross, “Presidents Club” in London were foci of this narrative

• Political influence through donations
  • Negative linking of political decisions to the influence of wealthy donors; NRA, Clinton Foundation were foci of this narrative

• Impact of Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017
  • In discussion of this legislation, some posted that they were less likely to donate due to the lost incentive of itemizing
  • Emergence of the term “donor class” in this discussion to describe wealthy political donors who would benefit from the legislation

Example post from “Political influence through donations” narrative

Example post from “Impact of Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017” narrative
What were other insights from this research?
Politics and political discussion is prominent in coverage of giving/philanthropy

- The top-mentioned people in news stories with giving/philanthropy keywords are largely political figures
  - Donald Trump was the most mentioned person, showing up in 9% of news stories

The link to politics persists despite removing posts and news articles that contained the word “election” from the results.

- Tweeters who used giving/philanthropy keywords were 16 times more interested in conservative politics and 27 times more interested in progressive politics than the rest of Twitter users

“More than 7,000 people have contributed over $400,000 to a GoFundMe campaign for the late Sgt. La David Johnson’s children in the day following outcry to President Donald Trump’s remarks to his wife, allegedly saying ‘he knew what he signed up for.’”

- “A GoFundMe for Fallen Soldier’s Kids Raised Hundreds of Thousands of Dollars in One Day,” Time.com, 10/18/17
Animal welfare is the most popular issue area within social media posts about giving/philanthropy.

- Posts about animal welfare were frequent and always among the most popular on social platforms.
- Posts about animals were more prevalent than posts about children, health, poverty/homelessness, or natural disasters.
- When examining posts on Facebook and Instagram for several giving campaigns (Giving Tuesday, Red Nose Day, and the overall term “match giving”), posts about animals were the most prevalent by a factor of 2.
The Red Cross blood donations page was the most frequently shared on Facebook of all news articles or pages linked to by news articles with giving/philanthropy keywords.

The Red Cross was the most frequently mentioned charity organization in news stories with giving/philanthropy keywords (2.4% of such stories mentioned Red Cross). No other charity made the top 20 mentioned organizations.

The Red Cross was the primary focus of the problematic narrative of “Untrustworthy charities,” due to coverage that investigated the charity’s efficiency in disaster response and deployment of resources.
This research will be repeated in the fall of 2019 to look at the year 8/1/2018 to 8/1/2019. Results will be compared to the initial year of findings and will be shared.

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