Giving and Philanthropy in the US

Analysis of discourse in news and social media

Year 2, 2018 – 2019
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
- Detect trends by repeating research year-over-year
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.
3. **CrowdTangle**, database of public Facebook and Instagram posts.

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 8/1/2018 and 8/1/2019. Compared with previous year’s results.
How much discussion of giving/philanthropy took place in the news and on social media?

What events and people drove this discussion?
Volume of Coverage/Discussion

News media
- 9K news publications and web domains
- 64K unique articles and website pages

Social media
- 36M Tweets (decrease from previous year)
- 5M Facebook posts
- 621K Instagram posts

In US news, the topic of philanthropy and giving was mentioned in 2.49% of all articles in the research year. This is more coverage than basketball (at 2.07%), but less coverage than football (at 3.73%).
Events Driving Coverage

- **News Media**
  - Largest peak surrounding Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony during confirmation of Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh, including crowdfunding campaigns to support her (Sept. 2018)
  - Smaller peak surrounding largest known GoFundMe fraud (Nov. 2018)

- **Twitter**
  - Largest peak on #GivingTuesday
  - Smaller peak on #BellLetsTalk Day (fundraiser in Canada)
  - Small peaks around political causes (#DitchMitch political fundraiser, protesting Home Depot for owner’s donations to Trump campaign)

- **Facebook**
  - Largest and only peak on #GivingTuesday

- **Instagram**
  - Largest and only peak on #GivingTuesday

While Giving Tuesday was a peak across all social platforms, unlike in Year 1, there were no events driving coverage on both social media and news media.
Which content producers drove news media coverage of giving/philanthropy?

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

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

As in Year 1, Washington Post and New York Times are leading influential publications on this topic. For the second year in a row, GoFundMe.com was the content publisher most linked to by news media.

One of the influential giving/philanthropy stories published by Forbes, which published the most content with giving/philanthropy keywords.
Who drove discussion of giving/philanthropy on social media?

- **Celebrities**
  - Young actors and musicians were among the most influential posters on Instagram in particular

- **Nonprofits**
  - Animal charities in particular were among the most popular and influential accounts on Facebook and Instagram

- **Philanthropists**
  - Zimbabwean philanthropist Strive Masiyiwa had the most-liked post about philanthropy/giving on Facebook for the second year in a row

- **Politicians**
  - On Twitter, politicians and political cause accounts were among the most influential
What are the main frames and 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.

- Very similar top words to Year 1 of research, with addition of some Democratic presidential nominee candidate names.
The following word cloud shows the most frequently used words in Tweets that also contain giving/philanthropy keywords.

- Wide variety of contexts present
- Campaign is prevalent (both political and fundraising contexts)
Top hashtags in Facebook posts

- 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.
- Hashtags for specific fundraising and political campaigns are prevalent.
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.
  - Hashtags related to animals and paid partnerships appear more on this platform.
The following chart shows the most frequently used hashtags unique to and shared by social platforms.

- Hashtags derived from social posts that also contain the giving/philanthropy keywords.
Recurring Narratives

Narratives found in the first year of research that continue to be present

- The power of crowdfunding
- Everyday people helping in small and big ways
- Donating as part of a healthy lifestyle
- Celebrity charity
- Philanthropists and their gifts
- Everyday people asking for money
- Untrustworthy charities and fundraising scams
- Political influence through donations
### Evolved Narratives

Narratives found in the first year of research that evolved slightly in this year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypocritical donors</td>
<td>Stories about an individual’s misconduct that also note the person’s philanthropic giving, emphasizing hypocrisy and lack of integrity on the part of the donor (in particular, Harvey Weinstein)</td>
<td>More focus on the culpability of institutions who took donated funds from hypocritical donors (in particular, Jeffrey Epstein)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate donations</td>
<td>Coverage and discussion of large corporate donations for natural disaster relief; social media reaction was mixed, in particular when it came to companies promoting their charitable giving</td>
<td>Distinctly critical thread in regards to &quot;exposing&quot; business leaders who donated to conservative political causes or candidates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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New Narrative

Donations and College Admissions

• The nationwide college admissions scandal revealed in 2019 and the Harvard admissions trial in late 2018 brought critical attention to the connection between wealthy donors and college admissions.

• There was social media ridicule and holding account of celebrities involved in these actions.

• Wider critique of the role of wealth and privilege in access to higher education.
What trends were observed over the two-year research period?
Giving and philanthropy intersect with a wide range of topics; no single campaign, event, person, or theme dominates the conversation.

- While Giving Tuesday caused the largest peak in daily volume on social platforms, Giving Tuesday content only accounts for <1% of news articles and <2% of social posts from the overall philanthropy topic.

- New narratives emerge in accordance with global events. Disaster relief dominated in 2017-2018; political themes were more prominent this year, and the college admissions scandal spurred a new narrative critical of donor access to elite educational institutions.
A link between giving/philanthropy and politics persists despite removing posts and news articles that contained the word “election” from the results.

In a sample, 14% of philanthropy news articles and 22% of philanthropy Tweets were about political giving.

- The most-mentioned people in philanthropy news stories were largely political figures.
- Individuals who tweeted about giving or philanthropy were found to be more interested in politics than the rest of Twitter users.
Animal rights issues are a popular subtopic within giving, especially in social media conversation.

- Posts about animal welfare were frequent and among the most popular on all social platforms.
- Animal charities were among the top influential posters on Instagram and Facebook in particular.
- When examining posts on Facebook and Instagram for several giving campaigns, posts about animals were the most prevalent by a factor of 2.
Thematic versus events-driven coverage. While coverage in Year 1 was driven by key tragic events (e.g., Hurricane Harvey, Las Vegas mass shooting), coverage in Year 2 was more thematic and not as driven by events.

Different philanthropists in top-mentioned individuals. News stories in Year 2 retained focus on philanthropists Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, but Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett were no longer in the top 20 as they had been in Year 1.

Additional new narrative. A new narrative emerged in Year 2 focusing on problematic links between philanthropic gifts and college admissions.

Decrease in the volume of Tweets on the topic. This is not attributable to any specific change in users or the platform.
With questions or to discuss this research, contact:

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