

Members of Congress are using Twitter more and more as a way to communicate with their constituents, champion causes or simply keep in touch with each other and the world. But, like anything, even Tweeting is a skill that can be improved upon, and some members of Congress seem to have mastered the "social" in social media, while others are talking to virtual space.

Drawing from data over the past month, exclusive analytics from OhMyGov! uncovers the healthiest and unhealthiest Twitter feeds in Congress, and reveals the importance of the message—not just the medium.

The key to a healthy Twitter presence is not necessarily in the followers, and it's definitely not in output. Just because Twitter makes it possible to provide minute-by-minute updates on a user's current state of mind doesn't make it a wise political decision to use it as such, e.g. Weinergate. The secret is in quality over quantity, and one measure of quality tweets is the amount of retweets an individual tweeter averages, revealing the popularity of the message.

The following chart reveals the strongest Twitter users in Congress by measuring the ratio of Retweets to Tweets for individual users.

*(H stand for U.S. House, S stands for U.S. Senate)

Of course, while the House of Representatives maintains some of the strongest Twitter feeds in Congress, it also bears some of the worst. The following chart shows a few of the least effective Twitter feeds in Congress, as measured by those with the lowest average retweets per tweet.

The strongest Tweeter in Congress is Allen West (R-FL) of the House of Representatives, who averages 112 retweets per every tweet he sends. That means that 112 different people find what he says interesting enough to share on their own walls every time he posts something new. West sent only 31 tweets last month, but collected a robust 3,501 retweets from his 43,000 Twitter followers who soak up his 140 characters ravenously.

On the flip side is Billy Long (R-MO), also from the House of Representatives, who averages 0.19 retweets per every tweet he sends. Last month, Long sent out 643 tweets, but those only managed to earned him 126 total retweets.

So what is the difference? Are West's followers just more dedicated?

Yes and no. Twitter can't prove whether anyone's constituents are more loyal, but it can show who is using the social media platform more effectively for political purposes. This understanding of Twitter may result in stronger campaigns because the politician's message is disseminated more clearly and consistently.

A big factor in attracting engagement, as measured by retweets here, is the size of one's following. West sports over 43,000 followers compared to Long's 2,185. In this case, size does matter, as more followers makes it more likely someone will retweet the message to their following, creating the viral flow of information.

One detractor from attracting retweets, however, is tweeting too much, whether they are original posts or a plethora of Retweets from favored politicians or celebrities. Too many posts in a day crowd up the feed, numb followers to yet another Tweet (if it's 12 in the past hour), and fog up the overall message.

West saves keeps his Twitter feed well manicured, limiting messaging to promote political causes or his own writing for followers to share. Only one or two posts a day means that when he does tweet, followers pay attention to check out the new information he shares. It seems that on Twitter as often it is in life; less is more.

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