


# Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Month Period in the 111th Congress

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# Summary

Beginning with the widespread use of e-mail by Congress in the mid-1990's, the development of new electronic technologies has altered the traditional patterns of communication between Members of Congress and constituents. Many Members now use e-mail, official websites, blogs, YouTube channels, and Facebook pages to communicate with their constituents—technologies that were either non-existent or not widely available 15 years ago.

These technologies have arguably served to enhance the ability of Members of Congress to fulfill their representational duties by providing greater opportunities for communication between the Member and individual constituents, supporting the fundamental democratic role of spreading information about public policy and government operations. In addition, electronic technology has reduced the marginal cost of constituent communications; unlike postal letters, Members can reach large numbers of constituents for a relatively small fixed cost. Despite these advantages, electronic communications have raised some concerns. Existing law and chamber regulations on the use of communication media such as the franking privilege have proven difficult to adapt to the new electronic technologies.

This report examines Member use of one specific new electronic communication medium: Twitter. After providing an overview and background of Twitter, the report analyzes patterns of Member use of Twitter during August and September 2009. This report is inherently a snapshot in time of a dynamic process. As with any new technology, the number of Members using Twitter and the patterns of use may change rapidly in short periods of time. Thus, the conclusions drawn from this data can not be easily generalized nor can these results be used to predict future behavior.

The data show that 205 Representatives and Senators are registered with Twitter (as of September 30, 2009) and issued a total of 7,078 "tweets" during the data collection period of August and September 2009. With approximately 38% of House Members and 39% of Senators registered with Twitter, Members sent an average of 116 tweets per day collectively.

Members' use of Twitter can be divided into eight categories: position taking, policy, district or state activities, official congressional action, personal, media, campaign activities, and other. The data suggest that the most frequent type of tweets were district or state tweets (24%), followed by policy tweets (23%), media tweets (14%), and position-taking tweets (14%).

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# Introduction

Beginning with the widespread use of e-mail by Congress in the mid-1990's, the development and adoption of new electronic technologies has altered the traditional patterns of communication between Members of Congress and constituents. Many Members now use e-mail, official websites, blogs, YouTube channels, and Facebook pages to communicate with their constituents—technologies that were either non-existent or not widely available 15 years ago.

These technologies have arguably served to enhance the ability of Members of Congress to fulfill their representational duties by providing greater opportunities for communication between the Member and individual constituents, supporting the fundamental democratic role of spreading information about public policy and government operations.[1] Electronic communications, however, have raised some concerns. Existing law and chamber regulations on the use of communication media such as the United States Postal Service have proven difficult to adapt to the new electronic technologies. In addition, electronic media could provide Members with the ability to easily communicate information traditionally sent to the district (or state) with non-constituents or non-U.S. residents.

This report examines Member use of one specific new electronic communication medium: Twitter. After providing an overview and background of Twitter, the report analyzes patterns of Member use of Twitter during August and September 2009.[2] This report is inherently a snapshot in time of a dynamic process. As with any new technology, the number of Members using Twitter and the patterns of use may change rapidly in short periods of time and undoubtedly will change over longer periods of time. Thus, the conclusions drawn from this data can not be easily generalized nor can these results be used to predict future behavior.

# Constituent Communication

Members of Congress have more choices and options available to communicate with constituents than they did 15 years ago. In addition to traditional modes of communication such as town-hall meetings, telephone calls, and postal mail, Members can now reach their constituents via e-mail, websites, tele-town halls, online videos, social networking sites, and other electronic-based communication applications.

The rise of such electronic communication has altered the traditional patterns of communication between Members and constituents. Although virtually all Members continue to use traditional

[1] Alfred A. Porro and Stuart A. Ascher, "The Case for the Congressional Franking Privilege," *University of Toledo Law Review*, vol. 5 (Winter 1974), pp. 280-281.

[2] Other studies have been conducted on the use of Twitter by Members of Congress. For example, see Jennifer Golbeck, Justin Grimes, and Anthony Rogers, "Twitter Use by the U.S. Congress," working paper, College Park, MD, 2009. [Hereafter, *Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers, 2009*]. Goldbeck, Grimes, and Rogers collected a total of approximately 6,000 tweets for their analysis. A copy is available from CRS upon request. Also, see Mark Senak, "Twongress: The Power of Twitter in Congress," January 2010, http://www.eyeonfda.com/files/twongress-white-paper-final-1-14-10.pdf; Daniel de Vise, "Tweeting Their Own Horns," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2009, p. A13; and University of Maryland, College Park, "UM Study Shows Congressional Use of Twitter Falls Short," press release, September 15, 2009, http://www.newsdesk.umd.edu/culture/release.cfm?articleID=1964.

modes of constituent communication, use of new communications technology is increasing.[3] For example, prior to 1995, there was virtually no e-mail traffic between Members and constituents.[4] In 2008, almost 200 million e-mails were sent to the House of Representatives, and a similar number were sent from House computers.[5] Member official websites, blogs, YouTube channels, and Facebook pages—all non-existent several years ago—also receive significant traffic.[6] Conversely, the amount of postal mail sent to Congress has dropped by more than 50% during the same time period.[7] In addition, electronic technology has reduced the marginal cost of constituent communications; unlike postal letters, Members can reach large numbers of constituents for a relatively small fixed cost.[8]

Member use of electronic communications has raised several concerns. Some of these concerns are similar to those associated with traditional modes of constituent communications, such as the potential electoral advantage that the franking privilege—the ability to send official mail for free—may confer on incumbent Members.[9] Other issues, such as the use of third-party communication software platforms, are unique to the new electronic mediums.[10] In addition, existing law and chamber regulations on the use of communication media, such as the United States Postal Service, have proven difficult to apply directly to the new electronic technologies.[11]

# Twitter

Created in 2006 by developer Jack Dorsey as a tool to keep in touch with friends, Twitter is a web-based social networking service that allows users to send and read short messages.[12] Also

[3] For journalistic accounts of the rise of electronic communications in Congress, see Elizabeth Brotherton, "A Different Kind of Revolution; Technology Redefines Constituent Outreach," *Roll Call*, September 10, 2007, p. 1; Amy Doolittle, "31 Days, 32 Million Messages," *Politico*, February 27, 2007, p. 1; Jonathan Kaplan, "2008 Candidates search Web for next new thing," *The Hill*, November 29, 2006, p. 6; David Haase, "Twitter: One More Medium, Much Shorter Messages," *Roll Call*, July 23, 2009, p. 4; and Daniel Newhauser, "Congress is All Atwitter," *Roll Call*, January 25, 2010, p. A-17.

[4] Chris Casey, *The Hill on the Net: Congress Enters the Information Age* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Academic Press, Inc., 1996), pp. 29-35.

[5] Data provide by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, House of Representatives.

[6] A survey of the YouTube Senate Hub homepage (http://www.youtube.com/user/senatehub) finds a large range in the number of views each video has received. Some videos have only a few dozen views while others have received tens of thousands of views.

[7] Data provided by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives and the Office of the Secretary of the Senate. See also Kathy Goldschmidt and Leslie Ochreiter, *Communicating with Congress: How the Internet has Changed Citizen Identification*, Congressional Management Foundation, Washington, DC.

[8] This substantially differentiates electronic mail from franked mail, which does incur a marginal cost. See CRS Report RL34188, *Congressional Official Mail Costs*, by Matthew Eric Glassman.

[9] See CRS Report RL34274, *Franking Privilege: Historical Development and Options for Change*, by Matthew Eric Glassman.

[10] See Emily Yehle, "YouTube Gets No $, but Good PR," *Roll Call*, January 14, 2009, p. 4.

[11] For specific House and Senate policies, see U.S. Senate Internet Services Usage Rules and Policies, adopted September 19, 2009, available at http://www.senate.gov/usage/internetpolicy.htm; and House of Representatives Member's Handbook, Committee on House Administration, available at http://cha.house.gov/members_handbook.aspx.

[12] Twitter, "Where did Twitter Come From?" *About Twitter*, http://twitter.com/about. For more information about social networking see Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Networking Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1 (October 2007), pp. 210-230; and Lee Humphreys, "Mobile Social Networks and Social Practice: A Case Study of Dodgeball," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1 (October 2007), pp. 341-360.

considered a micro-blogging site, Twitter users send "tweets" of up to 140 characters. These tweets are displayed on an author's Twitter home page and on the pages of people subscribed to the RSS feed associated with the author's Twitter home page.[13]

## Sending Tweets

Twitter enables individual users to post thoughts on any number of topics or activities. While Twitter use varies, it has been used by individuals and organizations to state opinions, promote events, and announce the release of products and services. Several legislative branch entities actively use Twitter to communicate with interested parties. These include the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO),[14] the Library of Congress (LOC),[15] the Government Printing Office (GPO),[16] and the Law Library of Congress.[17] In addition, Restaurant Associates, the House's food service vendor, uses Twitter to announce daily specials and events. Posting under the user name "ushrcafes," a typical tweet might look like this:

> It's Panini Week in Cannon Cafe! Today's featured panini is Chicken Parmesan. Buy a panini and get a free 16oz fountain drink all week![18]

Because of the 140 character limit on tweets, Twitter messages are necessarily short. The brevity of the messages highlights the ease with which tweets can be quickly sent from mobile devices to followers around the world. The rapid transmission of information allows individuals and groups to communicate instantly without limitation of physical distance.

## Following Twitter

Twitter allows individual users to "follow" other Twitter subscribers and read their tweets from the Twitter homepage. Individuals may choose to follow another Twitter account if they are interested in the information provided, are friends with the Twitter account holder, or if they are a "fan" of an activity or place. Following another user's Twitter account allows for almost instant access to his or her tweets. This can be useful if a follower is looking for a featured item or to better understand the activities of the person or group he or she is following. Individuals who "follow" an individual Twitter user can have instant access to tweets through devices such as a Blackberry, iPhone, or other similar mobile, internet-ready devices.

# Data Analysis

This report analyzes the following questions related to Member use of Twitter:

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[13] An RSS feed, which stands for Really Simple Syndication, is an opt-in service that allows users to receive targeted content from webpages, blogs, and online news sources. For more information, see Tom Barnes, "RSS: Marketing's Newest Communication Channel," *Journal of Website Promotion*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2005), pp. 15-30.

[14] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Twitter*, http://twitter.com/usgao.

[15] Library of Congress, *Twitter*, http://twitter.com/librarycongress.

[16] U.S. Government Printing Office, *Twitter*, http://twitter.com/USGPO.

[17] Law Library of Congress, *Twitter*, http://twitter.com/LawLibCongress.

[18] House Dining Services, tweet, September 1, 2009, http://twitter.com/ushrcafes/status/3689523683.

- What proportion of Members are using Twitter?
- How often and when are Members using Twitter?
- How widely are Member tweets being followed?
- What are Members tweeting about?

## Methodology

For August and September 2009, Members and Senators who were registered to use Twitter were tracked for their submissions. The website TweetCongress[19] was initially used to identify Members who were using Twitter. The list from TweetCongress was then cross-checked against a list of all Members and the Twitter search engine was used to verify that the correct and most current Twitter feed was being analyzed. The August and September time period included times when the House and Senate were in session and in recess.

Several caveats accompany the results presented. First, the analysis treats all Member tweets as structurally identical, because each individual tweet reveals no information about its genesis. In some cases, Members might be personally tweeting, whereas in others they are delegating Twitter responsibilities to their communications staff. CRS draws no distinction between the two. Second, some Members use Twitter as a communication medium in their official public capacity as Members, whereas others use Twitter as a communication medium for their campaign. Although there are important differences in the laws and chamber rules governing these two uses, CRS draws no distinction between the two in its analysis.

Finally, the analysis covers only two months of Member tweeting.[20] Therefore, it is inherently a snapshot in time of a dynamic process. As with any new technology, the number of Members using Twitter and the patterns of use may change rapidly in short periods of time. Thus, the conclusions drawn from this data can not be easily generalized nor can they be used to predict future behavior. They do, however, provide a glimpse into how Members are using a new communications technology to share their positions, policy preferences, and activities.

## Results

A total of 7,078 tweets were sent by Members of Congress during the 61-day period between August 1, 2009, and September 30, 2009. During this period, the House was in session for 14 days and in recess for 47 days. The Senate was in session for 21 days and in recess for 40 days.

[19] See http://tweetcongress.org. Tweet Congress is a website that encourages more Members of Congress to use Twitter. The website tracks every Representative and Senator who uses Twitter, and reports their tweets in an ongoing stream.

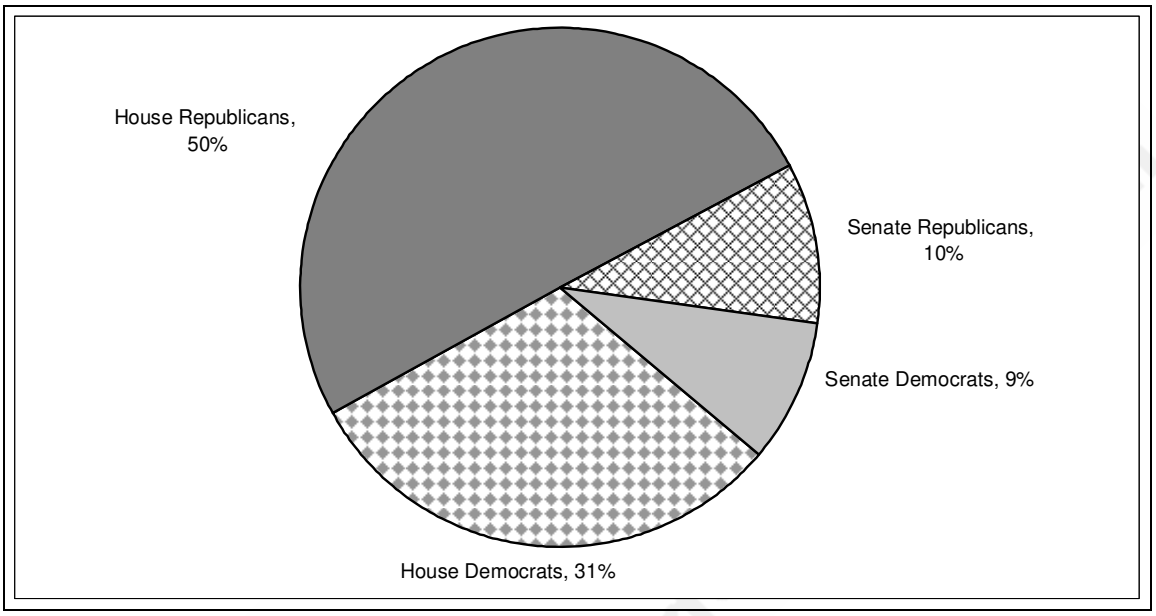
[20] A previous CRS report analyzed two weeks of congressional Twitter use. See CRS Report R40823, *Social Networking and Constituent Communication: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Week Period in the 111th Congress*, by Matthew Eric Glassman, Jacob R. Straus, and Colleen J. Shogan.

## Member Registration with Twitter

As of September 30, 2009, a total of 205 Members of Congress were registered with Twitter, 39 Senators and 166 Representatives. **Figure 1** presents the chamber and party affiliation of the 205 registered Members.

**Figure 1. Chamber and Party Affiliation of Members Registered with Twitter**

As of September 30, 2009




**Source:** CRS analysis of Twitter data from August 1 – September 30, 2009.

Although more than 80% of those registered were Representatives, registration rates were approximately equal between the chambers, with a slightly higher proportion of Senators (39%) registered than Representatives (38%).

Overall, 60% of registered Members were Republican and 40% were Democrats. As shown in **Figure 1**, approximately half of the Members registered with Twitter were Republican Members of the House of Representatives.

## Member Use of Twitter

Registration rates alone reveal little about actual Member *use* of Twitter, such as how often Members send tweets. During the two months of observation, registered Members sent a total of 7,078 tweets. The average number of tweets sent by an individual Member during the period was 35, or approximately one tweet every other day.

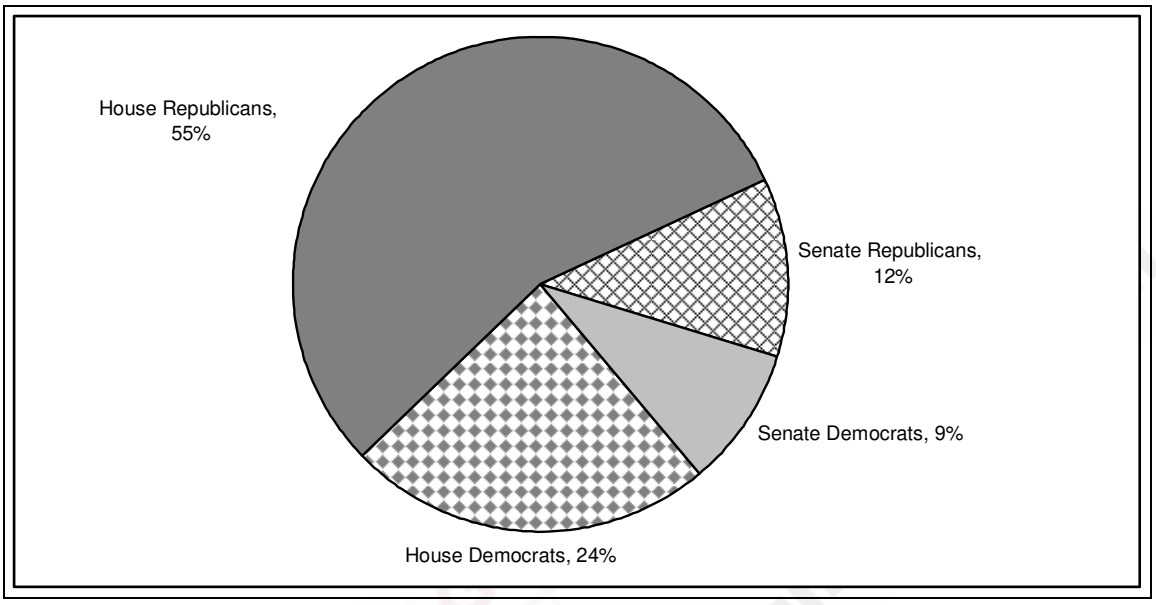
However, individual Member use of Twitter varied widely. The most active Member sent 291 tweets during the time period; several registered Members sent 0 tweets. Half of all registered Members sent 20 or fewer tweets during the time period; 16 Members sent more than 100 tweets.

Aggregated by chamber and party, Member use of Twitter was similar to Member registration rates. Seventy-nine percent (5,606) of all tweets were sent by Representatives, while 21% of all

tweets (1,472) were sent by Senators. **Figure 2** reports the percentage of tweets by chamber and party affiliation.

**Figure 2. Proportion of Tweets Sent, by Chamber and Party Affiliation**

August 1- September 30, 2009




**Source:** CRS analysis of Twitter data from August 1 – September 30, 2009.

House Republicans sent approximately 55% of all tweets during the two-month period, while House Democrats sent 24% of all tweets. Senate Republicans sent slightly more tweets (12%) than Senate Democrats (9%).

While, in aggregate, a greater number of tweets were sent by Representatives than Senators and by Republicans than Democrats, this is in part because a greater number of Representatives and Republicans were registered for Twitter than Senators and Democrats, respectively. At the individual level, there was somewhat less variation. Among those registered for Twitter, the average Republican Senator sent slightly more tweets (39) than the average Democratic Senator (36) during the time period. The partisan variation was larger in the House. Registered Republican Representatives sent an average of 38 tweets during the time period, while the average number sent by registered Democratic Representatives was 27.

## When Is Twitter Being Used?

Members sent a total of 7,078 tweets during August and September 2009, for an average of approximately 116 Member tweets per day. During this period, the House was in session for 14 days (and out of session for 47) and the Senate was in session for 21 days (and out of session for 40).

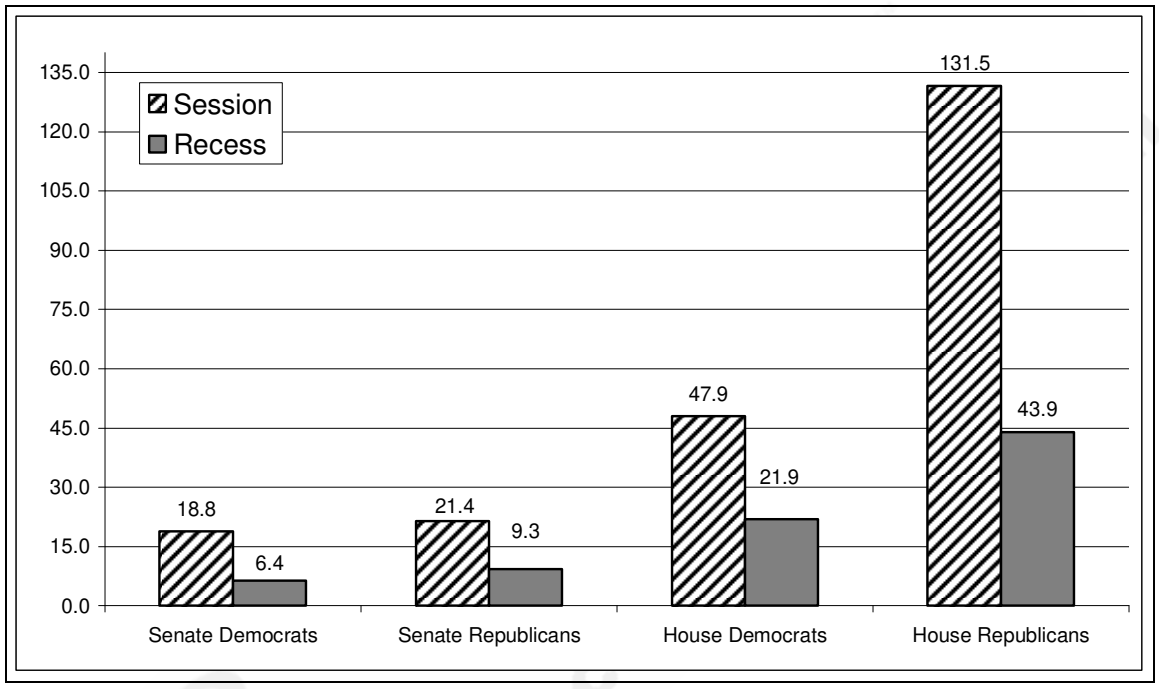
Overall, more tweets were sent during recess (3,772) than during session (3,356). However, Congress was on recess more than twice as many days as it was in session during the period under analysis. On a per-day basis, both Senators and Representatives sent significantly more tweets during session than during recess. Senators sent a total of 844 tweets in session, an average

of 40 tweets per day. During recess, Senators sent a total 628 tweets, an average of 16 tweets a day. Representatives sent a total of 2,512 tweets in session, for an average of 179 tweets a day. During recess, Representatives sent a total of 3,094 tweets, for an average of 66 tweets a day.

The tendency toward in-session tweeting also contained a partisan component. **Figure 3** reports the average number of tweets per day by party and chamber affiliation.

**Figure 3. Average Tweets per Day, by Chamber and Party Affiliation**

August 1 – September 30, 2009



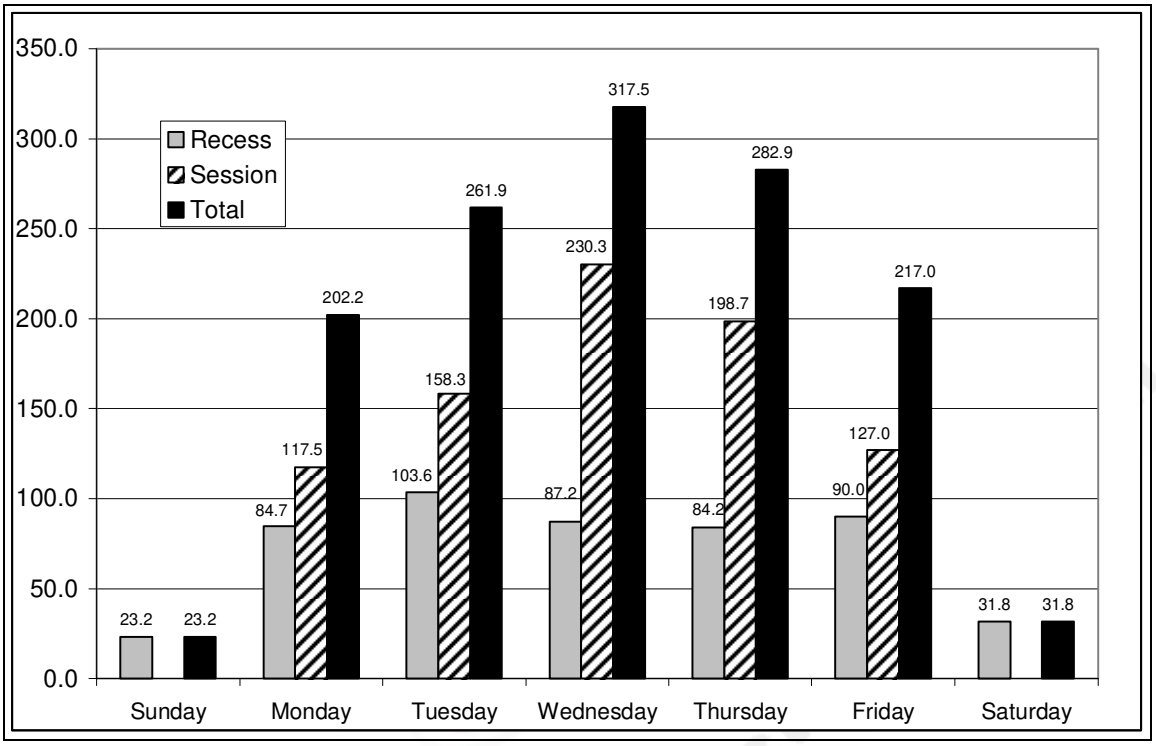

**Source:** CRS analysis of Twitter data from August 1 – September 30, 2009.

As shown in **Figure 3**, Members in both chambers and both parties sent significantly more tweets during session than during recess. However, the magnitude of the difference between session tweets and recess tweets was greater for Republican Representatives (approximately 3.0 times as many session tweets as recess tweets) and Democratic Senators (2.9) than for Democratic Representatives (2.2) and Republican Senators (2.3).

Data was also collected on the day of the week each Member tweet was sent. **Figure 4** and **Figure 5** report the average number of tweets sent by day of the week in the House and Senate, respectively, and whether the affiliated chamber was in session or recess.

**Figure 4. Representative Tweets, Average Per Day of Week**

Includes In Session, Out of Session, and Total Tweets



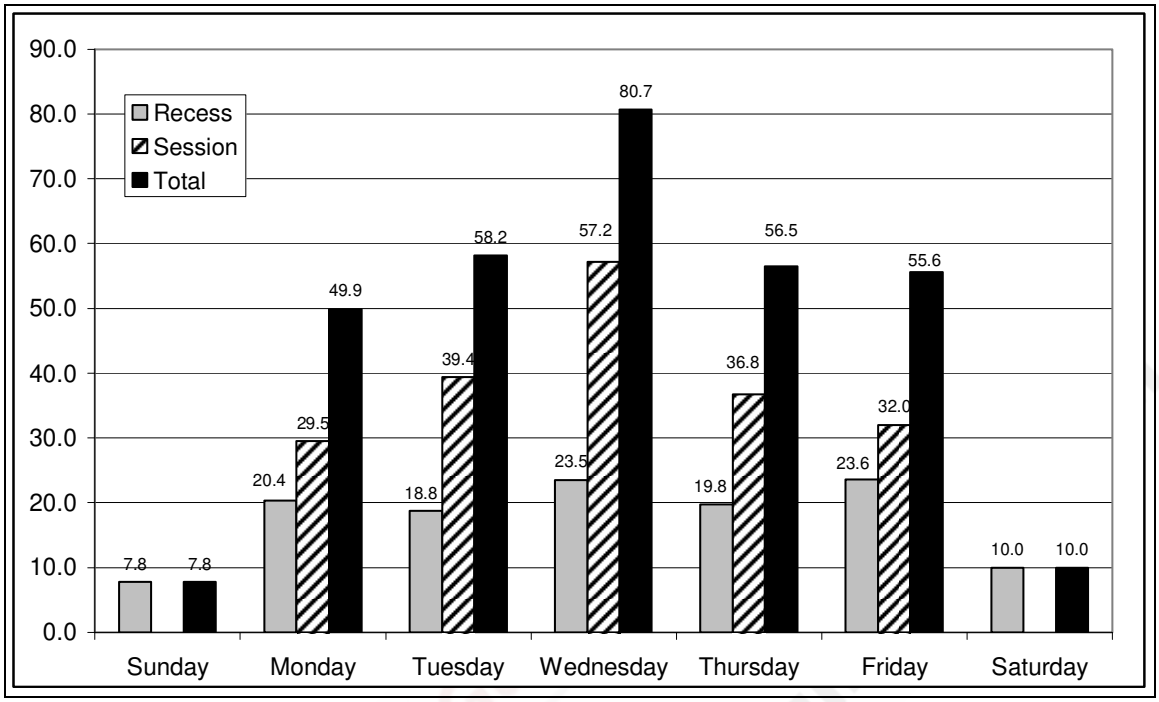

**Source:** CRS analysis of Twitter data from August and September, 2009.

As shown in **Figure 4**, Representative tweeting during recess was relatively uniform on the weekdays; no weekday had less than 84 tweets on average, and no weekday had more than 104 tweets on average. Representatives, however, were less likely to tweet on the weekends.

During session, Representatives sent the most tweets (an average of 230) on Wednesdays. Fewer tweets were sent, on average, on Mondays (118), Tuesdays (158), Thursdays (149), and Fridays (127). This perhaps reflects the general dynamics of House legislative activity when in session.

**Figure 5. Senator Tweets, Average Per Day of Week**

Includes In Session, Out of Session, and Total Tweets




**Source:** CRS analysis of Twitter data from August and September, 2009.

As shown in **Figure 5**, tweets by Senators followed a similar pattern to those of Representatives. Weekday tweeting during recess was relatively uniform, with no day averaging fewer than 18 tweets or more than 24. As with Representatives, Senators were less likely to tweet on the weekends. During session, Senators also sent the most tweets (an average of 57) on Wednesdays. Fewer tweets were sent, on average, on Mondays (30), Tuesdays (39), Thursdays (37), and Fridays (32).

## What Are Members Tweeting About?

To assess the content of Member tweets, eight major message categories were hypothesized: position taking, policy statements, media or public relations, district or state, official or congressional action, personal, campaign, and other.[21] Each observed Member tweet was coded into one, and only one, category.

Each tweet was coded according to two main characteristics: who issued the tweet and the type of tweet issued. All tweets were coded according to the issuer's party affiliation and whether the Member serves in the House or the Senate. All tweets were also coded into discrete categories concerning the type of message issued. Each author coded approximately one-third of the 7,078 tweets collected. To maintain consistency in coding, inter-coder reliability was established by having each author code the same sample of tweets.

[21] These eight categories constitute one plausible way to examine the data collected from Twitter; other categories may also be defensible. These eight categories, however, are differentiable from each other, and capture all the tweets issued during this two-month time period.

The categories were defined as follows:

### *Position Taking*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator took a position on a policy or political issue. The expressed position could concern a specific bill under consideration or a general policy issue.

> Met with Bernanke this morning. Reiterated my support for S. 604, legislation to audit the Federal Reserve.[22]

> Listened to the President tonight and what we need is a new bill, not a new speech. The problem isn't the messenger, it's the message.[23]

### *Policy Statement*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator discusses public policy without taking a position.

> White House: Cap and trade could cost families $1,761 a year http://tiny.cc/9gOUg[24]

> What is a health care exchange and how would health care reform affect coverage due to preexisting conditions? http://bit.ly/35yMSQ[25]

### *Media or Public Relations*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator provided information about an upcoming media appearance.

> On Fox & Friends now talking about health care![26]

> On Rachel Maddow right after this commercial break. Tune in![27]

### *District or State*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator discussed a trip, visit, or event in a home district or state. Tweets might include invitations for Tweet recipients to attend town-hall meetings or events in the state or district.

> Reminder that I'm holding a health care town hall TOMORROW (Sept. 2) in the Rancho Buena Vista high school gym at 630 PM. #tcot[28]

[22] http://twitter.com, September 10, 2009.

[23] http://twitter.com, September 9, 2009.

[24] http://twitter.com, September 19, 2009.

[25] http://twitter.com, September 2, 2009.

[26] http://twitter.com, September 1, 2009.

[27] http://twitter.com, September 9, 2009.

[28] http://twitter.com, September 1, 2009.

> Awesome Jefferson parade. Passionate crowd. People calling for leadership.[29]

### *Official Congressional Action*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator described or recounted an official congressional action. For example, a Member might tweet about a roll call vote, or discuss participation in a committee hearing or recent trip abroad.

> Headed abroad to visit troops in theater.[30]

> Attended Top Secret briefing on Afghanistan. Situation deteriorating. Pentagon preparing to ask for more troops. Need focus on this problem.[31]

### *Personal*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator discussed events in his or her personal life or provided opinions concerning matters that were explicitly unrelated to work in Congress.

> While in St. Joseph I made a second stop at the Stetson outlet store to get a second pair of Levi's.[32]

> Quick visit w Fraser – world's cutest nephew. Starting to smile ... .[33]

### *Campaign*

Tweets in which a Representative or Senator included campaign-related material. These included calls for fundraising support, mentions of campaign-related events, or criticisms of campaign opponents.

> My campaign just released a web video to help spread our message. I hope you'll watch & share with your friends....[34]

> Thx to all those who have joined, sent shout outs, & supported my campaign so far. Help get the word out....[35]

### *Other*

A catch-all category for Tweets that did not meet the definitional requirement of the other categories, or did not include enough information for a proper categorization.

[29] http://twitter.com, September 20, 2009.

[30] http://twitter.com, September 3, 2009.

[31] http://twitter.com, September 16, 2009.

[32] http://twitter.com, September 1, 2009.

[33] http://twitter.com, September 26, 2009.

[34] http://twitter.com, August 18, 2009.

[35] http://twitter.com, September 22, 2009.

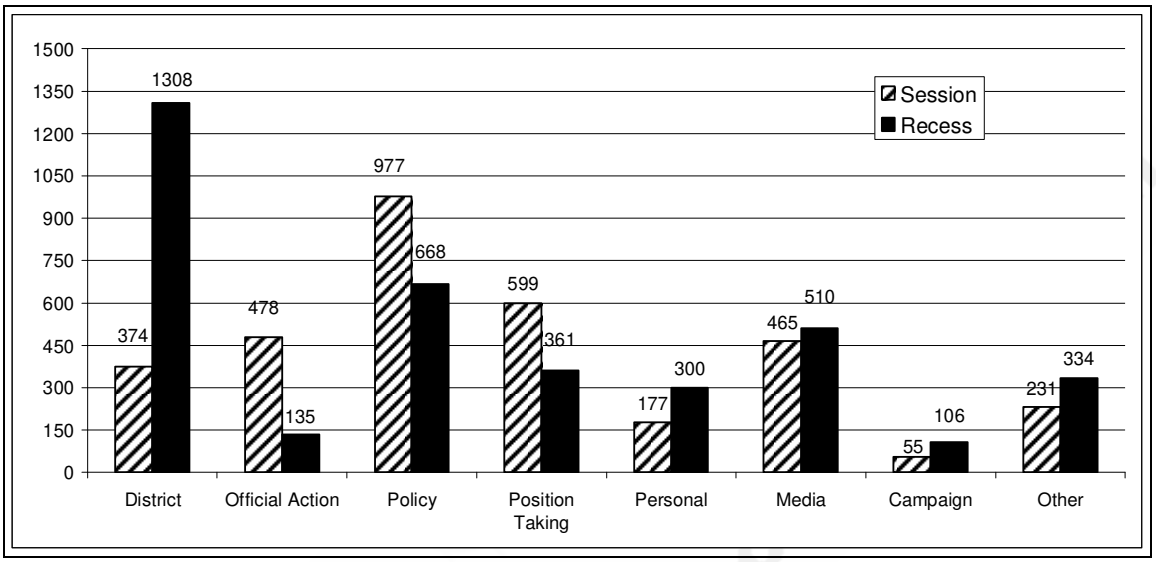
The bullet points are under three headlines and include 14 points....[36]

Not one dime? ... [37]

**Figure 6** reports the number of Member tweets by category.

**Figure 6. Member Tweets, by Category**

Including Session and Recess Comparison




**Source:** CRS analysis of Twitter data for August and September 2009.

As shown in **Figure 6**, the most common Member tweets in session were "policy" tweets and during recess were "district" tweets. Policy tweets comprised 29% of in-session tweets and 18% of recess tweets and "district" tweets accounted for 11% of in-session tweets and 35% of recess tweets. The variance in "district" tweets may reflect the changing nature of Members' daily duties in session and during recess from legislating in Washington to representation in the district.

During session, "position taking," "media," and "official action" tweets were common, comprising 18%, 34%, and 14% of all tweets, respectively. With the exception of media tweets, such tweets were less common during recess. The three remaining types of tweets—"personal," "campaign," and "other" comprised approximately 5% of all tweets in session and 20% of all tweets during recess.

Technological innovations have altered traditional patterns of communication between Members of Congress and their constituents. However, at this time, Twitter largely facilitates a one-way transmission of information from Members to the public. Members use Twitter to convey information about their official actions, press appearances, or policy positions. Given the limited data available thus far, a two-way exchange of information or policy dialogue appears less frequent. Of the 7,078 tweets coded, only 261 (3.7%) were direct replies to other tweets.[38]

[36] http://twitter.com, September 30, 2009.

[37] http://twitter.com, September 12, 2009.

[38] A different coding schema with additional categories produces slightly different results. Golbeck, Grimes, and (continued...)

### How Widely Are Member Tweets Being Followed?

The effectiveness of using Twitter to communicate information is partially dependent on the number of "followers" that have subscribed to an individual Twitter stream. The number of followers of any individual stream varies widely; a private citizen using Twitter only to communicate with his or her family might have only a handful of followers, whereas several contemporary celebrities currently have millions of followers.[39] Because the marginal cost of sending a Tweet to an additional follower is zero, there is little reason for a Member using Twitter to prefer fewer subscribers.

On December 30, 2009, data were collected on the number of subscribed followers for each Member of Congress with a registered Twitter account. In aggregate, Members had a total of 2,328,809 followers. The median Representative had 1,297 followers, with the most-followed Representative having more than 19,434 followers and the least-followed having 8 followers. In the Senate, the median Member had 3,536 followers, with the least-followed Senator having 216 followers, and the most-followed Senator having almost 1.7 million followers.[40]

Republican Members of the House of Representatives had more followers than their Democratic counterparts. The median Republican Representative had 1,563 followers, compared with 879 for the median Democratic Representative. For the Senate, the median Senate Democrat had slightly more followers than their Republican counterparts. The median Republican Senator had 3,216 followers, compared with 3,747 for the median Senate Democrat. The difference between House and Senate follower numbers likely reflects that most Senators represent larger constituencies than most Representatives, and arguably have greater national presence outside their districts.

# Concluding Remarks

The use of Twitter by Members of Congress is an evolving phenomenon. As Members continue to embrace new technologies, their use of Twitter and other forms of social media may increase. These mediums allow Members to communicate directly with constituents (and others) in a potentially interactive way that is not possible through mail or e-mail. For Members and their staff, the ability to collect and transmit real time information from constituents could be influential for policy or voting decisions.

(...continued)

Rogers used a nine-category coding scheme with categories including direct communication, personal messages, activities, information, requesting action, fundraising, and unknown. They found that the majority of tweets were information tweets (53%), followed by location or activity tweets (27%), and constituent (or outside Congress) communications (7%). *Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers, 2009*, p. 4.

[39] Many Internet sites have been developed to rank Twitter users by their number of followers. For example, see http://twittercounter.com/pages/100 and http://twitterholic.com/. Each of these websites list the top Twitter user as having approximately 3.5 million followers.

[40] The median number of followers for Members of Congress was used instead of the mean because of an outlier in the dataset. One Member of Congress has more than 1.2 million followers. Inclusion of this data point in the calculation of the mean provides an unrealistic average of followers for all Members using Twitter.

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