

2010's biggest stories influenced by celebrity tweets

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Tweets from popular news organizations have a major influence on hot Twitter topics, but a Northwestern University analysis of the Top Twitter Trends in 2010 shows that celebrities, such as Adam Lambert and Conan O'Brien, sometimes beat out news organizations and reigned as Twitter's top influencers on big news stories.

“The New York Times was the top influencer on the Gulf oil spill, which was the top topic of the year,” said Alok Choudhary, the John G. Searle Professor and chair of electrical engineering and computer science at Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science. “For the topic of Haiti, however, singer Adam Lambert was the most influential tweeter. For the Chilean miner rescue topic, comedian Conan O'Brien was the most influential, and singer Ricky Martin was number two.”

When a celebrity begins to actively tweet about a specific aspect of a news story, it seems his or her influence can trump a news organization's influence, said Choudhary, who created the website www.pulseofthetweeters.com, which analyzes data from Twitter in realtime.

“Adam Lambert tweeted for earthquake relief,” said Choudhary. “Top influencers are very heavily dependent on the topic they are tweeting about and the area of the topic.”

Popular news organizations, however, do regularly show up as top 10

influencers on trending news topics on Twitter, said Choudhary. For example, NPR News was the most influential tweeter on the topic of Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks. Also, 70 percent of all tweets on the topic of WikiLeaks seem to express positive sentiments toward Assange, said Choudhary.

Through pulseofthetweeters.com, Choudhary and his team use data mining, social network analysis and sentiment analysis to determine top influencers and sentiment distribution of the topics trending on Twitter. The website uses a specialized algorithm to rank the most influential people tweeting on trending topics. To qualify as a top influencer on a topic, the user must actively tweet about the topic and have a following that also tweets about the same topic.

Here are some more insights into the top influencers and sentiments that Choudhary's team discovered when they analyzed the biggest trends on Twitter in 2010:

- **People:** Lady Gaga, Mel Gibson and Justin Bieber were among the most tweeted about people in 2010, but no individual tweeter emerged as the most influential in this category when tweeting about these people. Sentiments for Lady Gaga and Bieber were more than 75 percent positive. Sentiments for the topic of Gibson were more than 65 percent negative.
- **News events:** NPR News, The New York Times, Time.com, CNN and The Wall Street Journal were often top 10 influencers on topics related to politics and world affairs.
- **Television:** E! Online was consistently the top- or second-ranked influencer on the topic of award shows such as the Grammys, the American Music Awards and MTV award shows. There was no top common influencer for all other top-trending tweeted TV shows such as

“Glee,” “The Family Guy” and “CSI.” Justin Bieber was the top-most influencer for “CSI,” but the top trending topic was actually about Bieber’s acting role in one CSI episode.

- **Sports:** LeBron James, Brett Favre, Michael Vick, Wimbledon and Manchester United were among the top sports topics in 2010. There were no clear common top influencers for these topics because they are very heavily dependent on the specifics of a particular topic rather than the category of sports, Choudhary said. Comedian Stephen Colbert, however, was the top influencer for the topic of Brett Favre. Wimbledon and Manchester United topics received overwhelmingly positive sentiments of more than 80 percent. Tweets about Michael Vick contained around 60 percent positive sentiments.

- **Technology:** Techmeme, Mashable and MacTweeter consistently ranked as top 10 influencers on trending technology topics of 2010, such as the Apple iPad and Google Android. Seventy-three percent of sentiments about the iPad and Android were positive.

- **Hashtags:** For the trending topic #thankful, in which people tweet about what they are thankful for, Bieber was again the most influencer tweeter. The sentiments of the [tweets](#) with #thankful hashtags were more than 98 percent positive. Coca-Cola was one of the top influencers for the topic of #icantlivewithout.

Provided by Northwestern University

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