

The Use of Social Media by Religious Leaders: Evangelical Leaders and Twitter

Abstract:

Social media is altering how some religious leaders communicate with their followers and with the public. This has the potential to challenge theories of religious communication that have been developed in the study of traditional modes such as sermons. We examine how leaders in U.S. evangelicalism use the public platform provided by Twitter. Using over 85,000 tweets from 88 prominent evangelical leaders, we find that these leaders often use their social media platforms as a natural extension of their current modes of communication. However, our findings also suggest that for some leaders social media may be a medium for political communication. Our analysis provides support for the belief that religious leaders that have gained a following for being politically active use their Twitter accounts to spread their political message in contrast to the clear majority of other leaders in our sample who remain relatively silent on political issues. We conclude with a discussion of how our analysis advances theories of religion and communication.

Introduction

While the use of social media by campaigns has been gradually increasing for the past decade, the utility of Twitter has moved center stage following the 2016 election season. Donald Trump, who used Twitter to great effect during his campaign (Hess 2016), would often take to the social media platform to respond to his critics, often by insulting them (Quealy 2016). Russell Moore, who serves as president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote an Op-Ed in the New York Times where he went on the attack against Donald Trump. Moore wrote, “The man on the throne in heaven is a dark-skinned, Aramaic-speaking ‘foreigner’ who is probably not all that impressed by chants of ‘Make America great again’” (Moore 2016). Trump fired back on his Twitter account three days later writing, “Russell Moore is truly a terrible representative of Evangelicals and all of the good they stand for. A nasty guy with no heart!”¹ This resulted in a Twitter exchange where Moore likened Trump to King Ahab who chose to follow false gods and had to be punished by Elijah (Dias 2016). After Trump’s unexpected victory in the presidential election, Christianity Today ran a column entitled, “Is It Too Late for Russell Moore to Say Sorry?” (Shellnutt 2016)

This event speaks to a larger question of how opinion leaders in evangelical Christianity engage with their followers and potential converts in the world of social media. For instance, some nationally known pastors such as Joel Osteen have used the platform to great effect, amassing nearly five million followers. The question is whether such success is uncommon. How do other, possibly more controversial figures use platforms like Twitter, especially when it comes to the volatile mix of religion, politics, and social media?

Literature Review

¹ <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/729613336191586304>

The scholarly community has devoted a great deal of time to understanding the precarious position that exists for clergy in regard to their ability to share controversial messages. Early work indicated that pastors and priests were overwhelmed with the necessity to maintain good relationships with members of their congregation and believed that if they spoke out on political issues that they ran the risk of alienating a significant portion of their membership (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959; Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974). These constraints are so profound that they either force a change in social theology, or at least put restraints on how that social theology is presented to the congregation. Stark writes, “we become convinced that silence is not something imposed on clergy, but something they impose on themselves” (Stark 1971, 97). However, more recent research has concluded that clergy do, in fact, speak out on political issues when they feel mobilized or want to encourage congregants to have their voices heard in the public sphere (Djupe and Gilbert 2002). While pastors at the congregational level can follow the lead, or advice, of those above them in their church hierarchy (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959; Calvano 2009), how, more broadly, do religious opinion leaders decide what is appropriate or inappropriate when it comes to discussing matters of government and politics online? Do these religious leaders take advantage of the freedom they enjoy on social media to say what is on their mind or are they, too, constrained by larger factors? This study seeks to answer these questions, particularly within the context of American evangelicalism.

To date, the literature remains largely void of an attempt to examine the social media activity (Twitter activity in particular) of evangelical leaders. The bulk of scholarly work on Twitter focuses, at a general level, on topic and sentiment analysis of Tweets (for examples, see Wang, Wei, Liu, Zhou, and Zhang 2011; Agarwal, Xie, Vovsha, Rambow, and Passonneau 2011; Neethu and Rajasree 2013), while, more narrowly, within the context of political sentiment and behavior there have been efforts to identify the political leanings of Twitter users and to extrapolate from these users’ political communications their electoral and political behavior (see Tumasjan et al. 2010;

Conover et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2012; Ceron et al. 2013). Regarding religious views, studies to date typically have been comparative in nature, focusing on differences in the social media use of religious and non-religious groups and how these differences translate into attitudes and policy preferences (Ritter, Preston, and Hernandez 2014; Taylor et al. 2016; Pennycook et al. 2017). The few studies that specifically examine the Twitter activity of evangelical leaders rely on a small sample size and further fail to consider these leaders' engagement with political issues (Codone 2014 and Cheong 2014).

Though little research on evangelical leaders' use of social media as a platform for engaging issues related to politics exists, several studies of celebrity use of social media offer some general clues as to the factors that may motivate and constrain the online activities of prominent evangelicals more generally. There is, for example, an important correlation between attitudes toward fame—namely, a strong desire for visibility—and frequent, active online engagement, such as posting and responding to posts as opposed to passively reading posts (Greenwood 2013).

According to Marshall (2010), there are three levels of self-presentation whereby celebrities exhibit their lives to a public audience online. The first is the “public self.” The public self is most interested in, what can be put simply as, self-promotion or self-marketing—i.e., ticket sales, public appearances, new book or music releases, etc. The use of social media as a marketing tool by celebrities has been highlighted by several studies, including Kaplan and Haenlein's (2012) examination of the viral marketing strategy utilized by Britney Spears.

The second form of public self-presentation is what Marshall calls the “public private self” (2010). This is a more personal presentation of self, meant to convey publically the celebrity's private life (albeit, at times, a choreographed version of it). Twitter is most often the vehicle of choice for displaying the public private self, mostly due to the platform's facilitation of “short textual bursts” that promote immediacy and possess a level of mobile connectivity not readily afforded by other

varieties of social networking (Marshall 2010, 45). This particular sort of self-presentation is akin to the fan-celebrity relationship exemplified by Lady Gaga and her “Little Monsters,” which is aided by her passionate online engagement with fans (Click, Lee, & Holladay 2013).

The “transgressive self” is the third form of self-presentation proposed by Marshall (2010)—it is also the hardest to measure. Marshall describes the transgressive self as “an accelerated pathway to notoriety and attention both in the wider world of on-line culture for all users and very visibly for celebrities whose behavioural transgressions expressed in interpersonal registers move swiftly into the powerful viral on-line juggernaut” (2010, 45). This self is most motivated by emotion, and it is often considered by audiences as the most honest form of self-presentation because it is often visceral and/or highly intimate in nature. The transgressive self is also the most likely to “go viral,” and is likely to be picked up quickly by traditional media outlets and entertainment news.

The dimensions of self-presentation discussed by Marshall (2010) provide a vocabulary for identifying factors that potentially constrain evangelical leaders from speaking out about politics on Twitter. For example, if addressing political issues could hurt a church leader’s image (public self) and thus hamper celebrity (desire for visibility), such activity is likely to be avoided. On the other hand, if an evangelical leader’s trademark message is uniquely political, political engagement on Twitter may be more likely. Even so, however unsurprising this speculation may seem, little effort has been expended in determining if these assumptions of evangelical leaders’ use of Twitter are born out empirically.

Data

To capture a general sense of how evangelical leaders use Twitter, the first task undertaken was to compile a list of prominent Twitter accounts; however, two factors complicated this task. First, there is no universally accepted definition of the concept “evangelical.” The scholarly literature has constantly evolved on the topic (see Bebbington 2003; Hackett and Lindsay 2008), and the

evangelical community struggles internally with the criteria (Kurtzleben 2015). The approach that we took was straightforward. We chose to analyze the accounts of prominent religious leaders that most individuals who attend traditionally evangelical churches would see as “one of them.”² This led us to compile a list that contained a number of denominational leaders, especially of the Southern Baptist Convention. In addition, the authors of bestselling books on Christian living like Rick Warren, Joyce Meyer, and John Hagee were added to the sample.

The other problem we encountered was how to define influential Twitter accounts. In general, we worked under the assumption that the Twitter accounts that have a larger number of followers are more likely to have their tweets read, retweeted, and responded to, therefore the total number of Twitter followers was considered as well. The average account that was included in our sample had 370,000 followers. The most popular account was Joel Osteen with 4.68 million followers while the fewest number was Ted Haggard’s (the former President of the National Association of Evangelicals) with 938 followers.³

Our final list was a collection of 88 total accounts that were scraped using the twitterR package, which was written for R statistical analysis software.⁴ Twitter has a number of APIs available to scrape tweets from their database, however the public API was chosen for this analysis because it is provided without charge to researchers.⁵ The final dataset contained 85,543 tweets with over 1.2 million total words. The scraping process was conducted during the first half of September

² Though it is hard to pin down a precise definition for evangelical, studies, including the 2011 “Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders” conducted by the Pew Research Center, identify a number of characteristics associated with self-identified evangelicals, including a “born-again” experience, commitment to following the teachings of Christ, commitment to evangelism (leading others to Christ), a belief in the exclusivity of salvation through Christ, and belief in miracles, among other characteristics. In addition to demonstrating the characteristics typical of evangelical Christians, those included in our dataset hold positions of leadership in a prominent church, religious organization, and/or possess characteristics of celebrity (i.e., a substantial public following, being a best-selling author, etc.).

³ A full list of each account in the sample is available in the Appendix.

⁴ See Gentry (2015)

⁵ There are several limitations to using the public API, and the one that constrains this analysis to the greatest degree is that a user can only download the last 3,200 tweets from each user account. This does truncate the dataset for some accounts; however, only one of the accounts that we analyzed contained more than 3,200 tweets and therefore we could capture the entire history of nearly our entire sample.

of 2016. The earliest tweet was created on December 13th of 2008, and the most recent tweet in the dataset was September 17th, 2016.⁶

Findings

The growth in Twitter volume

Figure 1 shows the change in the volume of Twitter activity of evangelical leaders during the period we sampled. One can easily see that frequency of tweets by evangelical leaders in our dataset increased exponentially over time. Due to the potential usefulness of rapid updates when it comes to sharing material, many have likely turned to Twitter as a social networking tool since one of the key features of Twitter is the speed with which it allows users to make updates (Levinson 2009). In April of 2016, there were 3,453 tweets scraped, and in August of the same year that total rose to 6,377 total tweets. The trajectory we observed would indicate that the number of tweets doubles every six to nine months.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The most effective and influential tweeters

Evangelical Twitter accounts can be examined by two broad metrics: *prolific-ness* and *effectiveness*. The former can be measured by simply comparing the total number of tweets per evangelical included in our analysis. The latter can be measured by comparing the number of Twitter followers per evangelical Twitter account and the frequency that evangelical tweets are retweeted and favorited by other Twitter users. By these metrics, Joel Osteen is, by far, the most prolific tweeter, followed by Beth Moore. However, while Joel Osteen has the greatest number of tweets that have been retweeted, Joyce Meyer and John Piper have had a greater proportion of their tweets retweeted by other Twitter users. Billy Graham is the least prolific tweeter among the top 35

⁶ This timeframe was chosen both to demonstrate the growing importance of Twitter as a medium of communication for evangelical leaders, and to allow for a larger longitudinal sample to facilitate a more holistic picture of salient words and topics mentioned in evangelical leaders' tweets that a cross-sectional snapshot would fail to capture.

evangelical Twitter accounts; although, a large share of (what few) tweets he has produced have been retweeted. When it comes to favorites, the share of tweets per evangelical Twitter account that have been favorited by other Twitter users is quite high. Joel Osteen, again, appears especially dominant. This would provide support for a clear association between the number of retweets and favorites received per tweet; however, favorites are more often received in comparison to retweets. Additionally, the number of followers per evangelical Twitter account appears to have a positive correlation with retweets and favorites; although, there are some exceptions.⁷

Figure 2 plots the mean number of retweets per tweet and the mean number of favorites received per tweet for each of the top 35 evangelical Twitter accounts. To make the plotted points more distinguishable, the mean number of retweets and favorites are placed on a log10 scale. The number of followers per Twitter account is denoted by the size of the plotted points: a larger point denotes more followers.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Effectiveness by one metric is positively associated with effectiveness in the other. While Joel Osteen is not only the most effective on Twitter, his number of followers is also the greatest. Meanwhile, Tim Tebow, who has the second most effective Twitter account, has fewer Twitter followers than Joel Osteen, but many more than the individuals who appear in the lower left corner of the plot. However, there are some exceptions to this pattern. Joyce Meyer and Lecrae, for example, have nearly equal levels of effectiveness even though the former has substantially more followers on Twitter than the latter.

Word Usage

⁷ See Appendix Figures 1A, 2A, and 3A for visualizations of how frequently the top 35 Twitter accounts receive both favorites and retweets.

When analyzing the words used by the evangelical leaders in the sample, the most straightforward and effective way to visualize frequency is a word cloud, which can be seen in Figure 3. It is not surprising from the sample that the evangelicals we analyzed used religious language with a great amount of regularity. “God” was the most used word in the sample, appearing a total of 10,656 times, which is over twice as much as the second most used word “us”. It is somewhat intriguing that this sample was three times more likely to use the word “God” than “Jesus”, and the word “Christ” is invoked half as much as “Jesus”. The overall tone of the words used by evangelicals could most aptly be described as encouraging and collective. For example, “will”, “love”, “new”, and “life” all appear in the top ten-word counts. In addition, the sample writes in an inclusive manner, with words like “us” and “team” having counts of over 4,000 occurrences each. It thus seems that many of the individuals who are preachers or evangelists use their Twitter accounts as an extension of their religious message. Many high-profile evangelicals like Joel Osteen use tweets as a way to encourage both their local congregation as well as the wider audience that follows them on social media. These results provide support for the notion that evangelical leaders both focus on the promotional use of social media and also on the ability for Twitter to create a connection between author and followers, although that connection could be considered particularly weak. What is also notable is that none of the top 250 words in the sample have any sort of overt political meaning. This will be explored in greater depth later in the analysis.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Engagement with Other Users

While the previous analysis seems to indicate that evangelical leaders try to use their tweets as a way to be inclusive of their audience, we wanted to further explore how often these individuals engage with the larger “Twitterverse”. One simple way to measure engagement is the number of replies to, or mentions of, another user via use of the “@” symbol either at the beginning, or in the

body of the text. Both of these actions lead followers to believe that an evangelical leader wants to draw attention to other users or to directly engage in a conversation with someone that follows them on Twitter. Each of these would provide direct evidence that social connectedness is a primary motivator for the use of Twitter by evangelical celebrities.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 4 displays the results from an analysis of the level of engagement that is evident among the most popular accounts in our sample (based on followers). It is quickly evident that there is a stark difference in the amount of engagement that occurs even in the three most popular accounts: Joel Osteen's, Beth Moore's, and Victoria Osteen's. In each of these cases a substantial number of interactive tweets occur, especially in the case of Beth Moore who includes the @ symbol in nearly 80% of her tweets. The balance for Joel Osteen is much closer to fifty/fifty. However, when one looks at the fourth, fifth, and sixth most popular accounts of Joyce Meyer, John Piper, and Rick Warren, an even starker pattern emerges. Joyce Meyer is nearly the opposite of Beth Moore, with just 156 out of nearly 2,900 total tweets that engage other users. From comparing the style and substance of Beth Moore and Joyce Meyer it seems evident that Moore is in control of her own Twitter account, while Meyer's seems to be run by a social media team.⁸ This difference could explain why Meyer's account is more reluctant to personally engage, while Beth Moore uses Twitter for primarily social engagement. We then broadened our analysis to the entire sample as a means to determine whether engagement is a causal factor for a more effective or popular Twitter account, but we saw no evidence for either of those two claims. From the data that we have collected it

⁸ The evidence for this claim can be found in the fact that many of Joyce Meyer's tweets are signed "-JMM" which is an abbreviation for Joyce Meyer Ministries. This would provide support for the belief that Ms. Meyer is not composing the tweets herself, but instead someone on her staff is in charge of social media.

seems to matter very little to followers whether an account engages other users or not, either through mentions, or direct replies.⁹

Analyzing Unique Words

In addition to measuring the total engagement our sample had with other users of Twitter we wanted to determine if each individual account had specific words or hashtags that they used which differentiated themselves from other Twitter users. Analyzing the uniqueness of users can be a valuable way to understand whether evangelical leaders are using their tweets as a way to teach followers about theology, to encourage them in their faith, to talk about their personal lives, or to promote their work. The approach that we took to finding unique words used by each account was tf-idf analysis, which is a measure of how often a term is used adjusted for how rarely it is used. In this case, we are comparing tweets of one user to the tweets of every other user in the dataset to see if they use unique words frequently. We conducted this analysis using the tidytext package written for the R statistical software program.¹⁰ The results of this tf-idf analysis can be seen in Figure 5.

[FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

It is crucial to note that tweets are inherently a difficult media to assess with textual analysis because they often contain many troublesome elements to parse such as hashtags and hyperlinks, which is evident in the results displayed in Figure 5. Instead of displaying the entirety of the sample, we have chosen the top ten Twitter accounts based on number of followers. It becomes quickly apparent that certain personalities are much more likely to use their social media as a promotional vehicle. The clearest example of this is Tim Tebow's usage of the phrase "avosinspace," an advertising campaign for avocados from Mexico, which Tebow was paid to promote.¹¹ Other evangelical leaders did not use their Twitter account to do paid promotion, but instead chose to

⁹ Scatterplots comparing engagement to both follower counts and retweets are available in Appendix Figures 4A and 5A.

¹⁰ See Silge and Robinson (2016).

¹¹ <http://gridironnow.com/tim-tebow-twitter-chat-categories-run-the-gamut/>

promote their own projects. Examples of this in Figure 5 include author and pastor Max Lucado, who frequently mentioned the name of several of his books, including “Grace: The Book”, and “Glory Days.” This same phenomenon also appears multiple times in the account of Lecrae, a Christian rapper, who mentions the name of his book “Unashamed” as well as the hashtags that he used for his musical tours, including “higherlearningtour” and “destinationtour.” These findings evince strong support for the public self (often interested in self-promotion) described by Marshall (2010).

In contrast to the accounts of those such as Tebow, Lecrae, and Lucado, are the Twitter accounts of evangelicals who are more likely to be seen as pastors by the public. In Figure 5, there are two clear examples of pastors using Twitter as an extension of their church ministry: Rick Warren and John Piper. Looking through the tf-idf results for either of these two reveals very little in the way of self-promotion. Rick Warren mentions the name of his church, Saddleback, frequently but only mentions once his popular book, “Purpose Driven Life.” John Piper’s tweets are even less promotional. The unique terms that Piper uses are books of the Bible including Psalms, Proverbs, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Luke. It seems, therefore, that people like Piper and Warren are forging a path on social media that does not fit neatly into the three levels of self-presentation proposed by Marshall (2010). It appears that a fourth dimension—“extension of professional career”—represents another likely use of Twitter by well-known individuals.

Mentions of Political Issues

In order to understand the extent that our sample engaged in political discourse we identified several words that either have general political inclinations or were focused on specific political issues. Of the 24 words that were chosen, ten were considered to be more general—i.e., words and names such as “Obama”, “Trump”, “election”, and “politics”—while fourteen were more focused on political issues that were popular during the timeframe of our sample—i.e., “ISIS”,

“abortion”, “gay”, “immigration”, “taxes”, and the “economy.”¹² Figure 6 indicates the frequency of each of the 24 words in the sample. In total 2,881 tweets contained at least one of these political terms. Names of nationally known politicians such as Obama and Trump were the most used by the accounts we scraped. For President Obama this might be due to the fact that he was in the White House for the entirety of our sample, but it is readily apparent that Trump’s name was very popular, despite the fact that he was only a national political figure for 18 months before he was elected President.

When it comes to specific political issues, evangelicals frequently mentioned the problem of ISIS in the Middle East, which may be due to the fact that the battle had a religious component that could have been used as fodder for evangelical Christians to discuss. The second most frequently used term however was “abortion.” We attempted to capture as many permutations of the gay marriage debate as possible by searching for “gay”, “homosexual”, and “homosexuality”, but even combined those three terms were still used with less frequency than abortion. This becomes an even more interesting finding when one considers that during the time period that our tweets were composed the United States Supreme Court legalized gay marriage in the United States (Yoshimo 2015). It may be that evangelical leaders have come to the conclusion that the gay marriage fight is over, with public opinion shifting rapidly in favor of legalization (Brewer 2014), while abortion is still a highly divisive issue among the general electorate (Pacheco 2014).

[FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Looking beyond how much these political terms were mentioned generally, it is important to understand how these political tweets are distributed throughout the sample of 88 accounts that were analyzed. Figure 7 displays the frequency of political term mentions by the 35 most politically

¹² Words were selected that mentioned either important national political figures (particularly 2016 presidential candidates) or that alluded to salient social, security, or economic issues. A full list of words selected can be found in the Appendix.

active evangelicals in our sample. A cursory glance at the results paints a clear picture: a small number of evangelical leaders are doing the lion's share of the political discussion. Two individuals stand out from among the rest when it comes to who was most likely to discuss political topics. The Twitter account that contains the most political language is Jay Sekulow's, who is the chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, an organization that is committed to fighting for the religious liberty of evangelical Christians in the United States.¹³ The other prominent political tweeter is David Barton, who is the founder of Wallbuilders, LLC, an organization that promotes the argument that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and that there should be no separation between church and state.¹⁴ The fact that these individuals tweet frequently about political matters provides support for the idea that they use Twitter as a vehicle to promote the message that made them popular in the first place. These individuals exist largely outside the constraints that are placed on pastors who preach to the same congregation on a weekly basis. The evidence for this conclusion becomes strengthened by the fact that none of the top ten political accounts are those of pastors of individual congregations but instead are those of evangelicals who have strong ties to politics, like Sekulow, Barton, Ralph Reed, and Tony Perkins. These individuals are not constrained by politics; rather, their influence may be amplified when they speak on political issues.

[FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

While it is apparent that there is a fair amount of political tweets being written by evangelical leaders, it is important to note how much or little of the other overall sample is composed of political messages. Figure 8 displays the number of tweets that are non-political, contain discussion of general politics, and contain terms related to specific political issues.

[FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE]

¹³ <http://aclj.org/jay-sekulow>

¹⁴ <http://www.wallbuilders.com/abtbiodb.asp>

In total, our sample contained over 85,543 tweets from 88 total accounts. Of those tweets just 1,653 contained words generally related to politics such as Obama, Trump, or election and 1,395 contained discussion of ISIS, abortion, taxes, and other hot button political topics. Taken together just 1.8% of all the tweets in our sample were political in nature. In addition, while we found that 70 of the 88 accounts did contain general or specific political language, very few accounts could be described as being especially political. As Figure 8 indicates, over half of all the political mentions in the sample came from three accounts, and nearly two thirds of the total mentions come from the top five accounts. Taken together, those five highly political accounts comprise a total of approximately 215,000 followers,¹⁵ which is just five percent of the followers of either Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer, two accounts who hardly ever engage in political discourse. It seems entirely possible that an evangelical Christian could follow a dozen or more of the accounts in this sample and never see a mention of politics at all.

Discussion

As a first cut, this analysis provides few hard conclusions; however, it does provide numerous interesting insights that hopefully serve to inspire theoretical contributions and more in-depth empirical analysis from other scholars. It is most obviously clear that Twitter use by evangelical leaders has exponentially increased in the past several years, suggesting that religious leaders see growing value in Twitter as a social media platform. It is further evident that evangelical leaders' Twitter activities vary substantially in both their prolific-ness and their effectiveness. The latter, measured via average counts of both favorites and retweets per tweet, shows a noticeable association with the number of followers per Twitter account (with only some exceptions) while the

¹⁵ This number does not consider the number of people who follow several of the accounts in the top 5, and therefore the likely number of unique followers for these five individuals is less than 200,000 in total.

former, though still relevant, lacks an equally strong association with the share of favorites and retweets received per tweet.

Through use of a rarely applied, but valuable, technique for text analysis (term frequency – inverse document frequency, or “tf-idf”), we were able to identify the unique self-portrayals of top evangelicals. While some displayed unique engagement in various degrees of self-promotion, others used their Twitter accounts as a distinctive extension of their ministry. Furthermore, our analysis shows that the nature and scope of evangelical leaders’ engagement with followers is likely constrained by the primary purpose of a given leader’s Twitter account. While some evangelicals’ accounts seem to be run by a marketing or ministry team, other accounts are used by evangelicals personally, with the latter scenario facilitating one-on-one interaction and the former precluding it.

Regarding politics, the unique message and public image of a given evangelical leader appears to either limit or enable political activity. Some evangelicals whose popularity and image are founded upon a uniquely political message have significantly more political tweets compared to others. Meanwhile, those whose image is more firmly grounded in ministry, music, art, athletics, etc. are less politically active. Overall, when the sample is considered in aggregate, the Twitter activity of a minority contingent of politically engaged evangelical leaders is easily eclipsed by the apolitical tweets of the remaining evangelicals in our sample. Thus, it seems that matters of church and state only occasionally comingle in the online activities of evangelical leaders’ in the “Twitterverse.”

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Figures

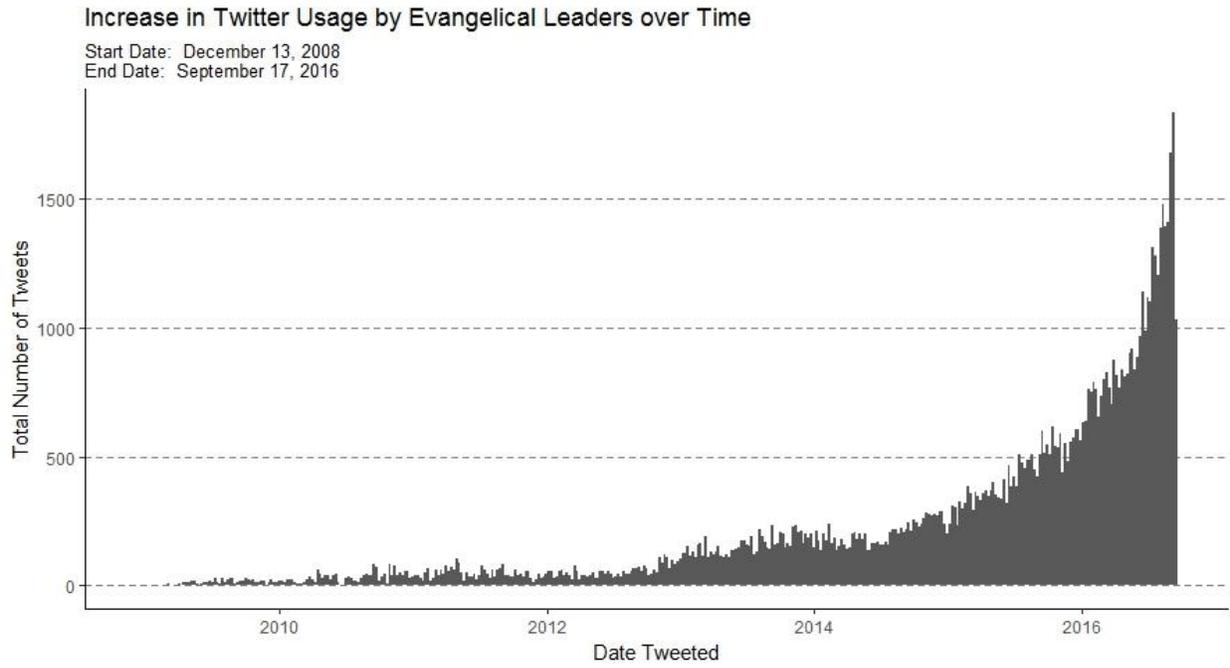


Figure 1.

Effectiveness of Top 35 Evangelical Twitter Accounts

Effectiveness Measured by the Mean Number of Retweets per Tweet and the Mean Number of Favoriteds Received per Tweet.

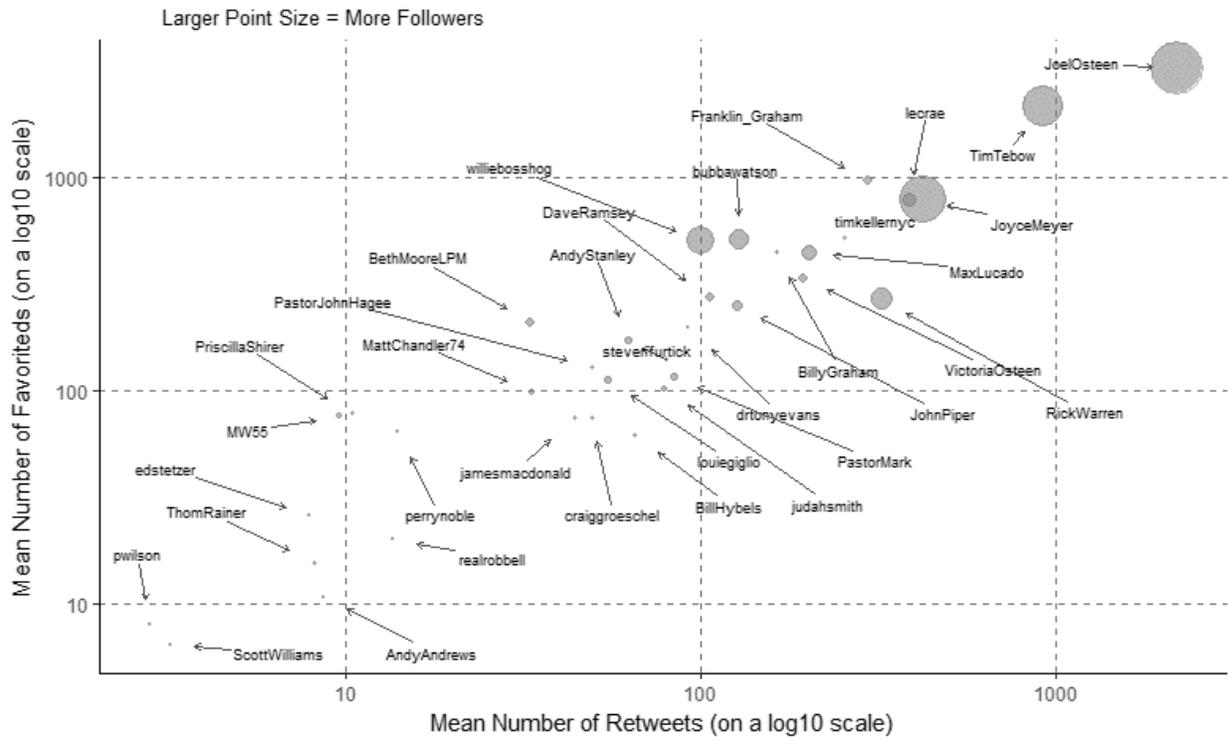


Figure 2.

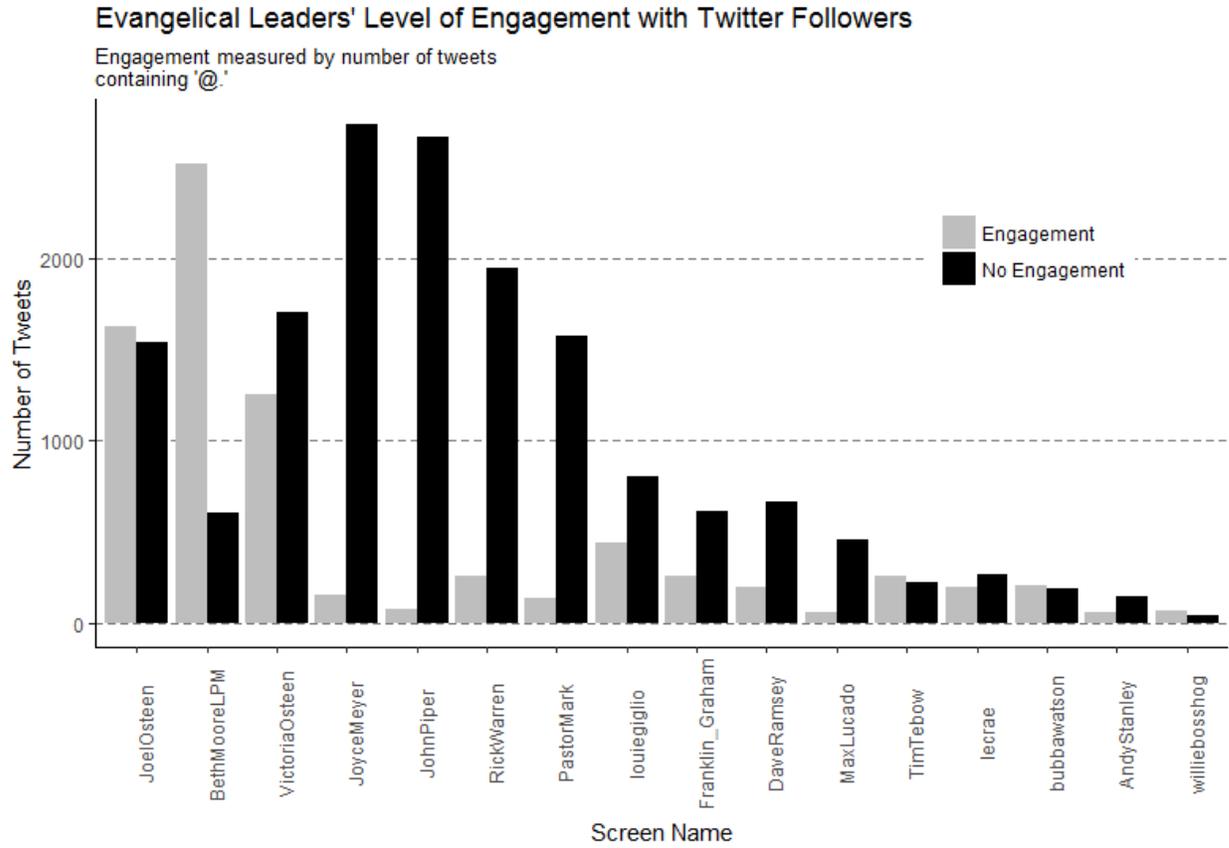


Figure 4.

Top tf-idf Words

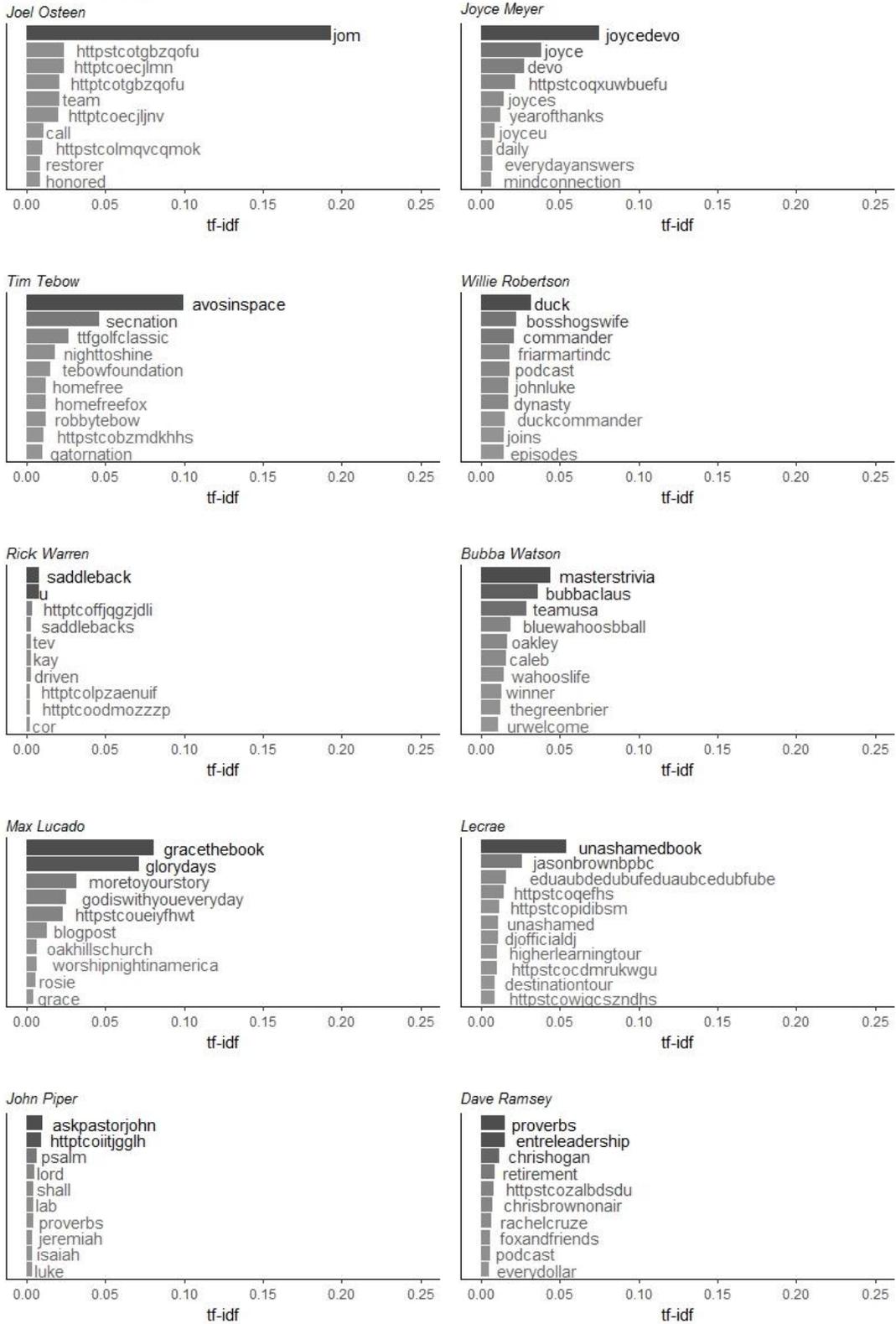


Figure 5.

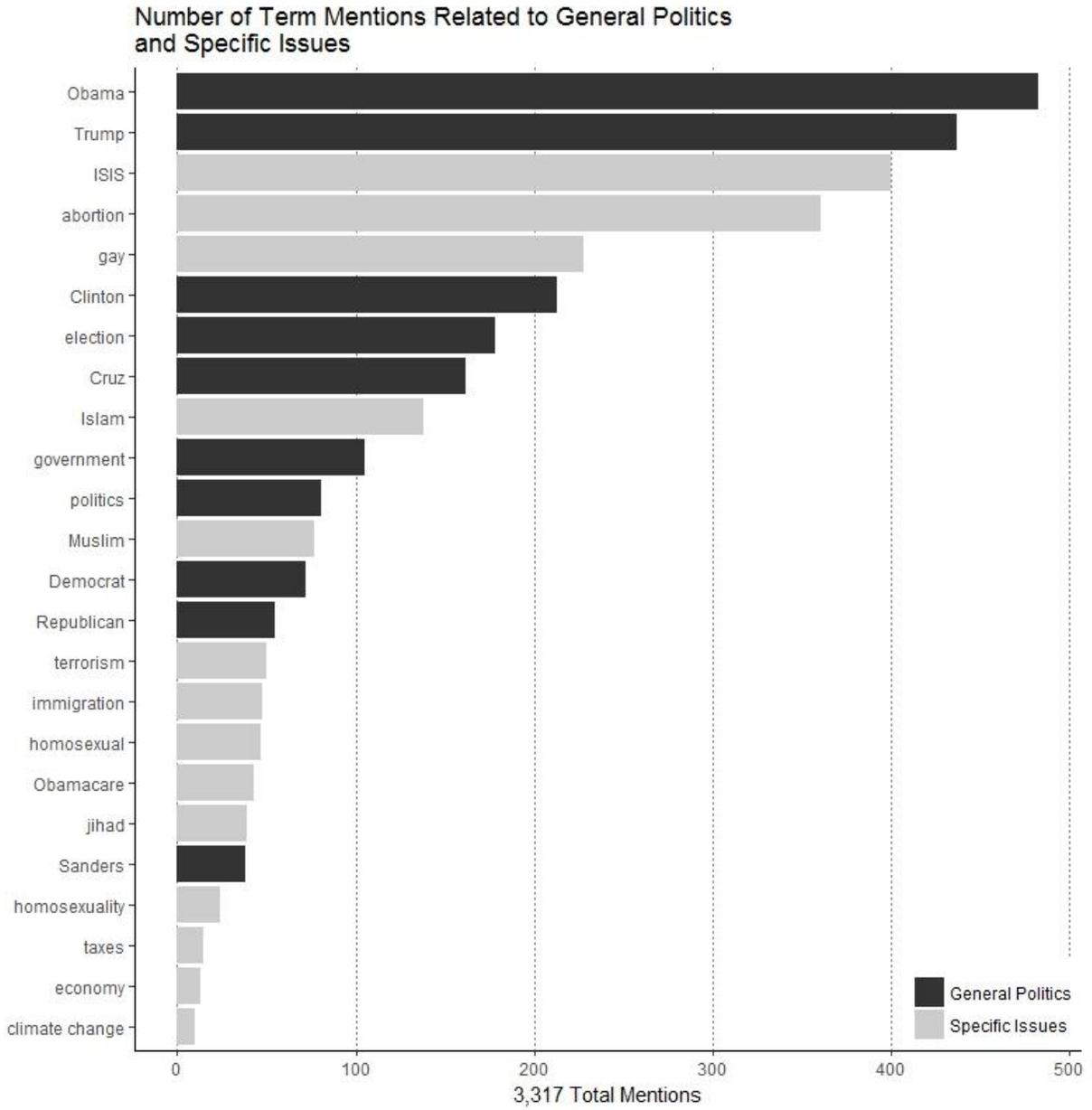


Figure 6.

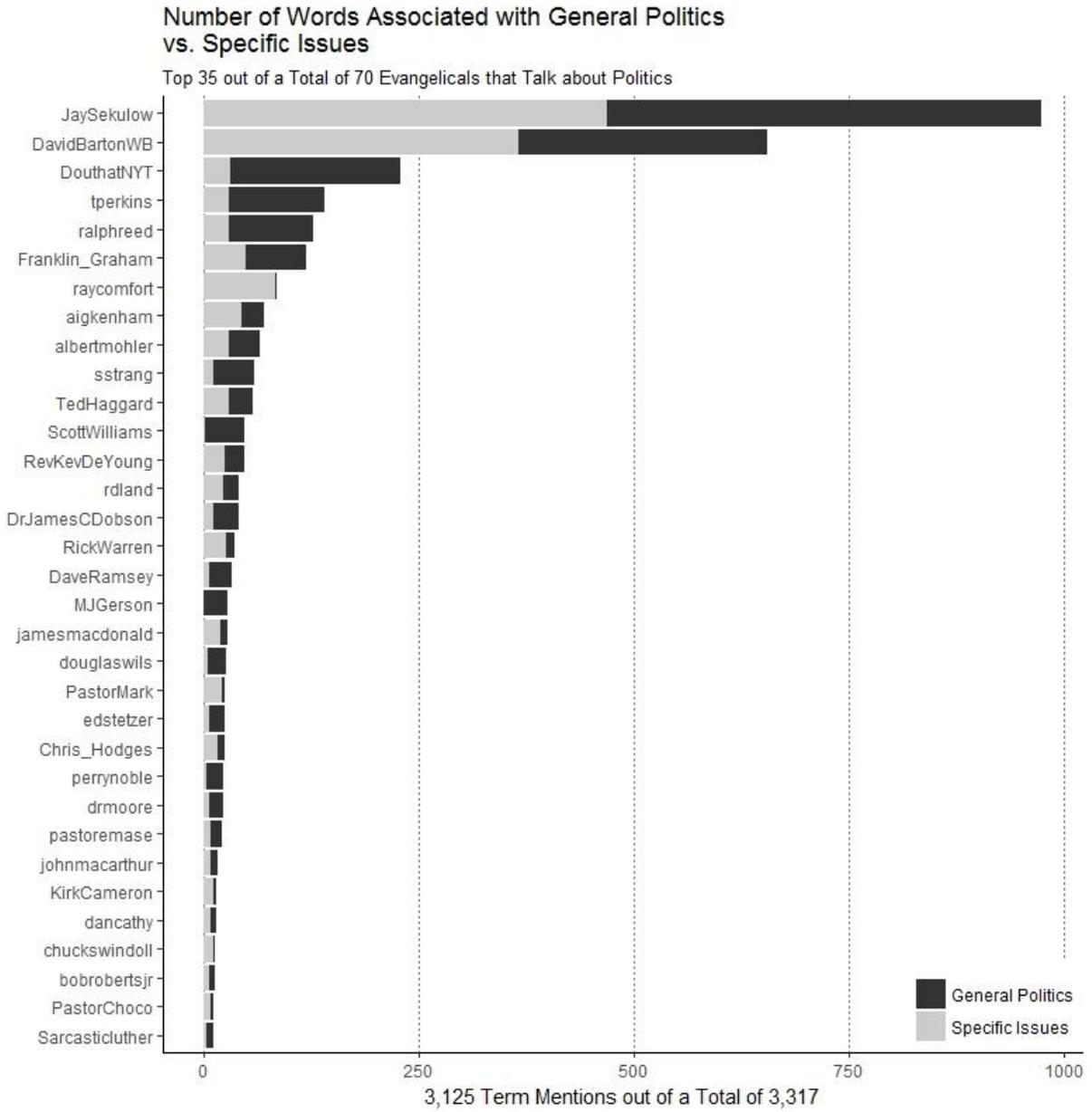


Figure 7.

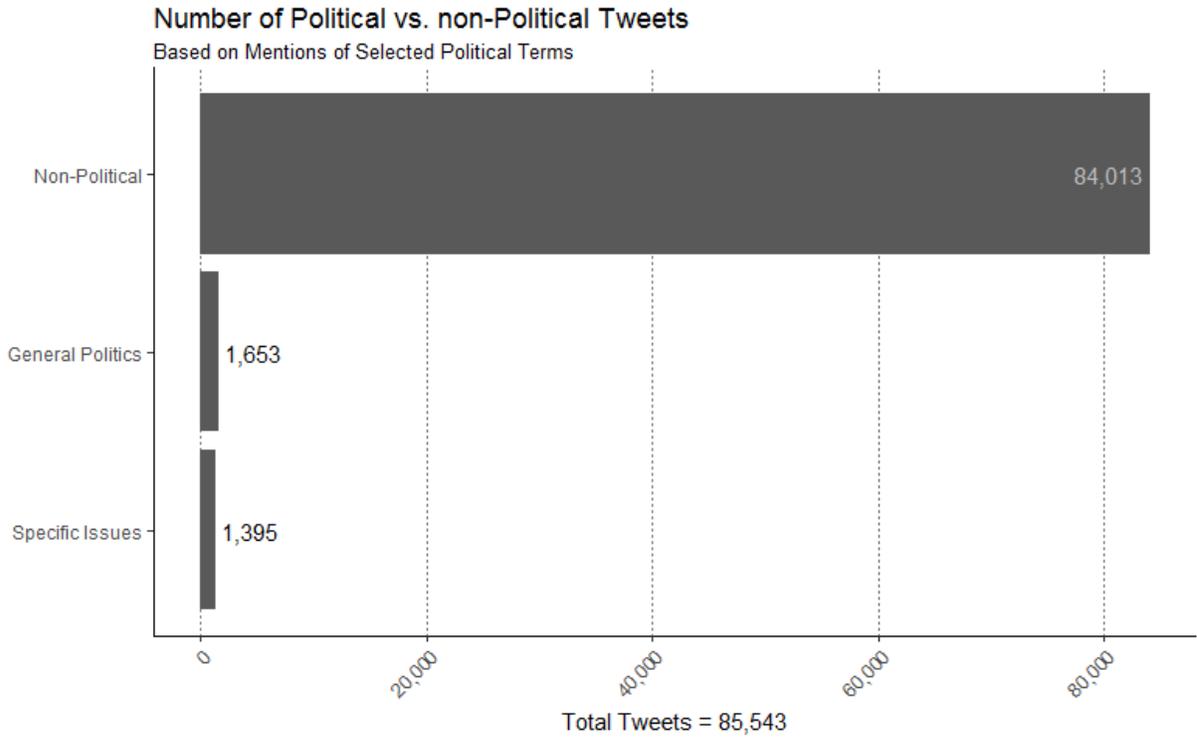


Figure 8.