Quick Network Analysis of Great Lakes THATCamp, Utilizing Twitter API.

Jon Voss, LookBackMaps. April 30, 2010.

Based on a white paper I wrote earlier this year on social network analysis using Twitter[1], I did a quick study of how the network of attendees at the Great Lakes THATCamp changed before and after the event. Rather than use a survey or other hands-on methodology to assess relationships before or after, I used Twitter as a proxy, given the high rate of attendees using Twitter before the event (84%).

To the extent that Twitter is indicative of people's relationships, and I would argue that it does offer a useful glimpse of the network, we can see that a small, informal unconference like THATCamp is an effective way to build stronger connections.

For the scope of this study, I chose to focus on the in-network connections of event attendees, rather than the role these individuals play in the larger environment of their own second degree connections.

I've provided three illustrations that summarize the change in the network before and after the event: a chart showing the number of in-network followers before and after the event, as well as two graphs of the network before and after the event with an emphasis on strong ties, or reciprocal Twitter followings.

Of particular interest is the increase of hubs created by the event. Prior to the event, only one person had more than 20 followers within the network of attendees. After the event, the number of attendees with more than 20 followers increased to 12. The average increase in in-network twitter followers for attendees was 201%, suggesting a high number of new connections were made at the event.

I decided to show the Twitter handles in the illustrations, in part to underscore the utility of open data. While I feared a popularity contest, showing handles can help clearly identify network hubs and spot potential patterns like a great percentage increase in in-network followers for those who travelled further to the conference.

I hope these statistics can provide a useful glimpse into the potential of regional THATCamps to effectively make meaningful connections and lead to a greater number of collaborations in the digital humanities. The use of Twitter in this particular network may offer a useful tool for network analysis, and provide some quantitative measurement of network growth.
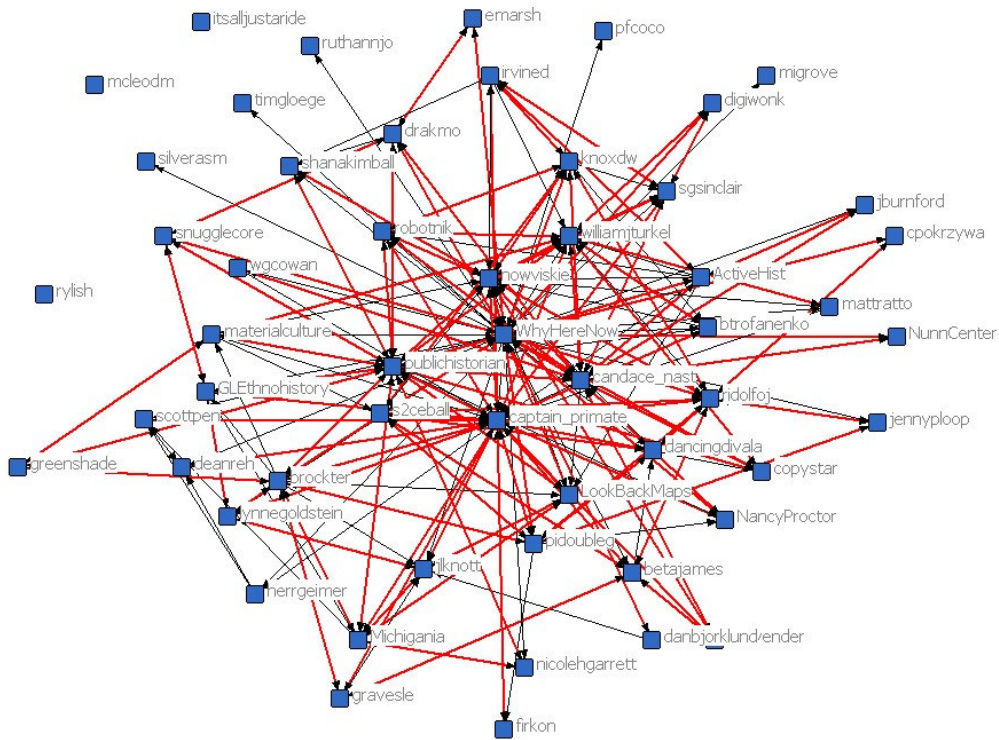

In-network Twitter Followers Before and After
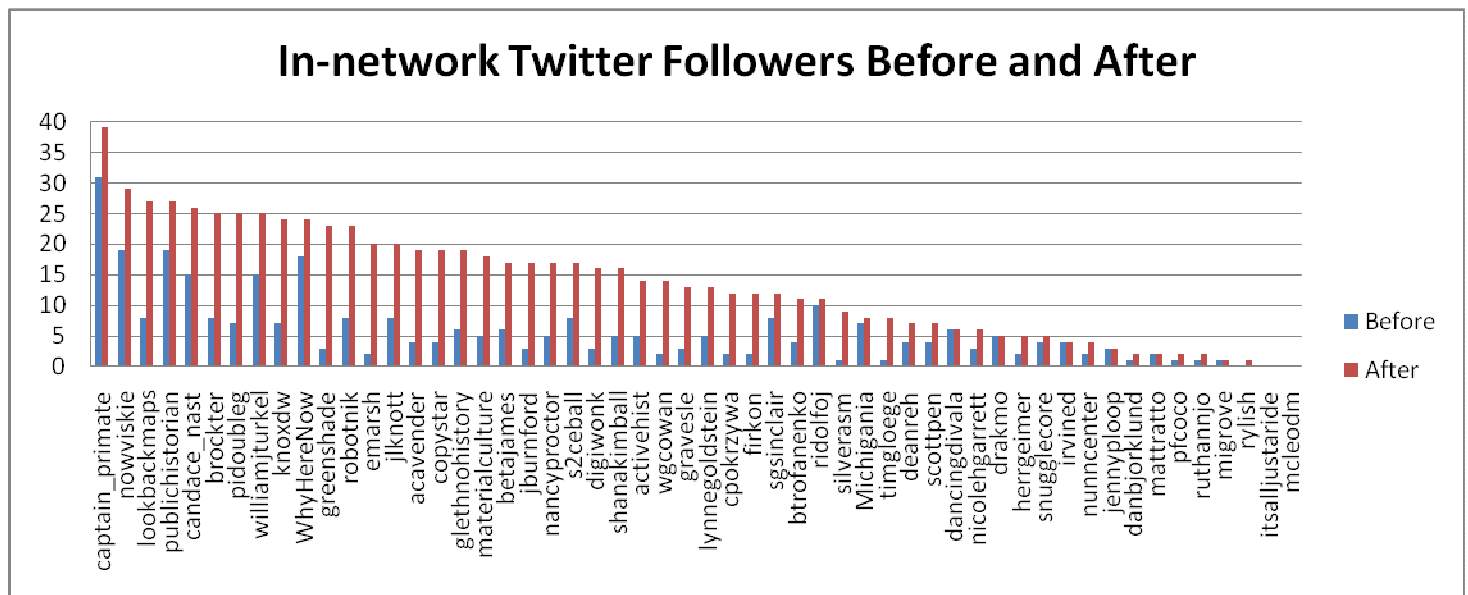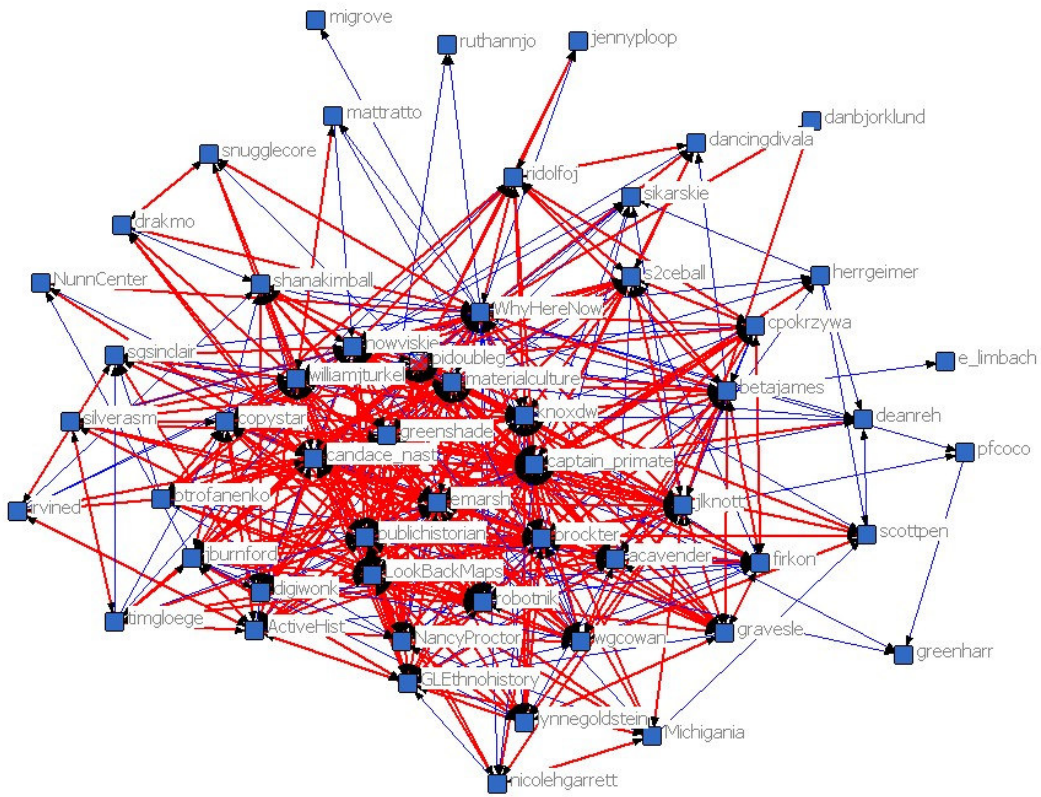
Figure 2. Before. Emphasis on reciprocal connections in red.

Figure 3. After. Increased density of reciprocal connections.

1 http://blog.jumpslide.com/2009/12/new-mapping-social-networks-white-paper.html