

TWITTER AND BUSINESS: A CASE STUDY

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***Abstract.** Today’s communication is considerably characterised by the too wide use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube etc. This research paper starts from prior studies referring to Twitter in various domains, among which business. The aim of the study was to identify the domain in which this social medium could be best valorised. Its popularity has made Twitter best suited for business and communication. In business, Twitter was found to be fit for public relations campaigns, marketing communications, branding, and destination management organisations. Given that destination management organisations using Twitter ranked it first in customer service (for providing compliments, criticisms, and enquiries) and interactivity when compared to Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, other types of business should also try using it.*

Keywords: Twitter, social media, social network, business.

INTRODUCTION

Twitter is an American microblogging (“the activity or practice of making short, frequent posts to a microblog” – [13]) and social networking (“the use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one’s own” – [13]) worldwide service on which users (twitterers) post 140-character written messages and 140-second audio and video messages (tweets) and interact with others users (Figure 1). Only registered users can like, post, or retweet messages, while unregistered users can only read publicly available messages.



Figure 1. Twitter logo

Twitter has enriched old words with new meanings and even coined new words – more than other social networks such as Instagram or Facebook:

- Until 16 years ago, English-language dictionaries mentioned only tweet “the chirp of a small or young bird” [13], to tweet “make a chirping noise” [13], tweeter “a loudspeaker designed to reproduce high frequencies” [13], twitter “a series of short, high-pitched calls or sounds” [13], and to twitter “(of a bird) give a call consisting of repeated light tremulous sounds” [13]. Now, tweet also means “a post made on the social media application Twitter” [13], to tweet also means “make a post on the social media application Twitter; communicate with (someone) on Twitter” [13], tweeter also means “a person who posts on the social media application Twitter” [13], and to twitter also means “make a posting on

the social media application Twitter” [13]; Twitter “social media application” [13] (330,000,000 monthly active users in 2019) produced retweet “(on the social media application Twitter) repost or forward (a message posted by another user)” [13], Twiplomacy “the use of Twitter [...] by government agencies and officials to engage with the public, disperse information and even leverage global influence” [28], the Twitterati “avid or frequent users of the social media application Twitter [early 21st century from Twitter, the proprietary name of the social media application, on the pattern of literati, glitterati, etc.]” [13], Twitterature “a written work (or body of works) of a particularly humorous, clever, and/or poignant nature, and artfully stated in 140 characters or less [early 21st century from Twitter, the proprietary name of the social media application, on the pattern of literature]” [25], twitterer “a person who makes a posting on the social media application Twitter” [13], Twittersphere “users of the social media application Twitter, considered collectively [early 21st century blend of Twitter, the proprietary name of the social media application, and -sphere]” [13], Twitter storm “a period characterized by a sudden increase in the number of posts made on the social media application Twitter about a particular issue, event, etc., especially one that is controversial in nature” [13], and the Twitterverse “users of the social media application Twitter, considered collectively [early 21st century blend of Twitter, the proprietary name of the social media application, and -verse]” [13].

- Instagram (500,000,000 users daily in 2019) has also produced to Instagram, Instagrammability, Instagrammable, Instagrammed, and Instagrammer.
- Facebook (2,850,000,000 monthly active users in 2021) has produced only to Facebook and Facebooker.

Moreover, Twitter involves a long list of terms such as Avatar, Bio, Blocking, CT (Charity Tuesday), DM (Direct Message, Email Notification, Favourite, FF (Follow Friday), Find People, Follow, Follow Count, Follower, Following, GFF (Get Followers Fast), Handle, Hashtag (#), Home Timeline, Hovercards, Integrated Search, Listed, Lists, Mention, Mobile Web, OH (Overheard), Over Capacity Page, Profile, Promoted Tweets, Protected / Private Accounts, Reply, RT (Retweet – noun and verb), Search, Spam, Timeline, Timestamp, Top Tweets, Trending Topic, Tweet (noun and verb), Tweet Button, Tweeter, Twitterer, Unfollow, URL Shortener, and Username.

What made Twitter more productive than other social media applications with much more followers?

One explanation might be that of Kwak et al. (2010) who observed, among reciprocated users, “some level of homophily (the tendency for people to seek out or be attracted to those who are similar to themselves – [13])”.

Another explanation could be the “retweet” function of Twitter: its users are likely to retweet when the tweet “is about a general, public topic instead of a narrow, personal topic”, which makes Twitter “better suited as a news and announcement channel rather than a personal communication platform” [17].

Twitter has had a considerable impact on several domains [8]: archeology; business – brand following [29], destination marketing organisations [26], marketing communication [23], and public relations [6,4]; communication – information and communication technology [12], interpersonal communication patterns [17,27]; marketing communication [23]; professional discourse [20], retweeting as a conversational practice [2], science communication, and social media campaigns [7]; education [11,14,18]; health [15]; politics [5,16]; psychology [10]; religion [21]; research [14]; society [12,5,7,22,24]; sports [1]; and tourism [26].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material used in this study consists in articles and book chapters published between 2006 and 2020 about the social media application Twitter, with focus on business. The case study method (a method of observational research) was used in this study, both as “a process or record of research into the development of a particular person, group, or situation over a period of time” [13] and as “a particular instance of something used or analysed in order to illustrate a thesis or principle” [13].

RESEARCH RESULTS

What can Twitter do for businesses? A lot, if we take into account that “Twitter is the #1 platform for discovery, that people spend 26% more time viewing ads on Twitter than on other leading platforms, and that 53% of people on Twitter are more likely to be the first to buy new products” [3].

In general, millions of businesses, organisations, and people use Twitter to discover and share new information. In particular, businesses can use Twitter to build relationships with people who care about them, to gather market insights and intelligence, and to share information. To build a business’ customer trust, following, and reputation, PR practitioners should follow a few simple practices:

- Ask questions of the followers to glean valuable insights and show that they are listened to;
- Avoid appearing too desperate;
- Champion the stakeholders;
- Demonstrate wider know-how and leadership;
- Establish the right voice (with a direct, genuine, likable tone);
- Follow the right people;
- Give a glimpse of developing events and projects;
- Monitor the comments about the brand(s) company, and products;
- Reference articles and links about the bigger picture as it relates to the business;
- Reply to and retweet publicly great tweets posted by the customers and followers;
- Respond to compliments and feedback in real time;
- Share behind the scenes info and photos about the business;
- Tweet updates about special discounts, offers, and time-sensitive deals;

The first studies on Twitter were published four years after the birth of this social media application. In 2011, researchers started to doubt the ability of social networks “to influence a participatory governance model, grassroots civic engagement, new social dynamics, inclusive societies, and new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs” [5].

1. Twitter and Public Relations Campaigns

However, the same year, Evans, Twomey & Talan (2011) investigated the use of Twitter in PR campaigns and found that, for executive-level PR professionals, microblogging is a valuable asset to the social media strategy of a campaign because “Twitter offers a form of communication not offered by other social media applications”. The findings of the study show that PR executives:

- Think Twitter:
 - Allows for instant communication to a wide audience and to micro-target communications to specific communities;
 - Enables direct interactions with consumers, media, and anyone who wants to participate in the conversation;
 - Helps identify and create relationships with key influencers both on the client and media side;

- Is a key channel to create social connections, engage where relevant, and listen to conversations, a valuable asset to their daily practice, a valuable communication and PR tool;
- Is able to provide information in a directed, quick, and succinct manner and more relationship building;
- Opens a one-on-one line of communication with members of the media;
- Provides a real-time temperature check on what topics are resonating at that moment in time and real-time insights;
- Use Twitter:
 - Allows to micro-target communications to communities of interest;
 - In integrated communications campaign;
 - To communicate with target audiences;
- See Twitter in the future:
 - As a tool used for marketing purposes;
 - Imbedded in the corporate communication / marketing conversation;
 - To be used for customer service, feedback solicitations, news snippets, and offers.

The only negative aspects of using Twitter in PR campaigns are [6]:

- Time management;
- Reputation management.

Recently, Chakraborty (2020) analysed PR messages on Twitter in an attempt to identify the share of primary sentiments – criticism, enquiry, neutral, out of context, and support – capable of modifying public opinion. Chakraborty’s results show the following percentages: support – 26%, neutral – 15%, out of context- 15%, criticism – 14%, enquiry – 10%, and N/A – 20%. Another aspect studied was that of the languages of comments: out of 881 comments analysed, 608 were in English (of which 204 supportive), 99 in Hindi (of which 38 out of context), 5 were links (all no comments), 3 were images (all supportive), 1 was punctuation (enquiry), and 165 noted nothing (all no comment). Overall, the public comments were categorised into supportive, neutral, criticism and enquiry categories and were considered a good example of branding something properly.

2. Twitter and Marketing Communication

Nine years after Twitter was launched, Soboleva, Burton & Khan (2015) noted its increasing use by businesses and discussed the potential benefits of marketing with Twitter, as well as some successful Twitter marketing strategies.

Thus, the following are considered potential benefits of marketing with Twitter:

- Engagement with customers by including celebrities in brands’ conversations to draw attention to unfamiliar brands, by including hashtags and weblinks to increase retweeting, by monitoring and responding to consumer comments online, by using popular hashtags such as #FF (Follow Friday) to promote organizational products or outlets;
- Exposure to wide audiences due to the inclusion of hashtags, to the popularity and presence of celebrities, to retweeting, to its technological features;
- Monitoring and responsiveness to get an indication of sentiment towards a brand, to spread information and engage in discussion with stakeholders, to track and respond to mentions of the brand’s Twitter handle;
- Powerful additional channel as part of the marketing mix (“a combination of factors that can be controlled by a company to influence consumers to purchase its products” – [13]) due to connecting a brand with customers directly, to driving market shares, to driving traffic to a brand’s website, to exposure, to increasing the percentage

of sales, to promoting, to rapid propagating messages, to rapid responding, to stimulating sales;

- Word of mouth (“spoken communication as a means of transmitting information” – [13]) due to creating content responding to trending themes.

Successful Twitter activities need specific measures – related to brand activity, brand engagement with the network, follower engagement, and message content – to be taken (Table 1).

3. Twitter and Following Brands

Phua, Jin & Kim (2017) examined consumers’ use of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter “for following brands and its influence on brand community-related outcomes” starting from the ideas that:

Table 1.

Measures for Twitter successful activities

Focus	Measures
“Brand activity”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Followers” • “Tweets per day”
“Brand engagement with the network”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mentions of others” • “Replies to others” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Private” • “Public” • “Retweets of others”
“Follower engagement”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Being favoured by others” • “Being listed by others” • “Being retweeted by others”
“Message content”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Twitter dependent features” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hashtags” • “Weblinks” • “Twitter independent features” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Apologies” • “Questions” • “Retweet - Call to action”

Source: Soboleva, Burton & Khan, 2015.

Frequent users of these social networks:

- “Have different impacts on brand community-related outcomes – commitment, engagement, identification, and membership intention”;
- Would derive different gratifications from their use – demonstrating sociability, following fashion, improving social knowledge, passing time, sharing problems, and showing affection;

“The relationship between social networking sites uses and brand community-related outcomes would be moderated by several intervening variables:

- Attention to social comparison;
- Social networking sites trust;
- Tie strength;
- Network homophily”.

The conclusion of the research was that “Twitter users had the highest brand community identification and membership intention” of all four social networking sites.

4. Twitter and Destination Marketing Organisations

Uşaklı, Koça & Sönmez (2017) examined the use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) by 50 European destination marketing organisations to promote and market their destinations. The study used the content analysis method to investigate the use of these social media in 2015 from seven perspectives – content, customer

service, engagement, information type, interactivity, major theme, and promotion. As far as Twitter is concerned, research results show the following [26]:

Content:

- Twitter posted additional content material: a website link (998 tweets, 65.6%);
- Twitter ranked third with 90 of the 505 videos posted;
- Twitter tagged an average number of people less than 0.5;

Customer service (compliments, criticisms, enquiries provided by European destination marketing organisations on social media): Twitter ranked first with 213 responses to compliments, second with 7 responses to enquiries, and third with 1 response to criticisms;

Engagement (“behaviors that go beyond simple transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” [26]):

- Twitter ranked fourth in engagement metrics with 24 Likes / Favourites, 16.2 Shares / Re-tweets, and 1.1 Comments / Replies (“Dislike” function is not available on Twitter);
- Twitter top five European destination management organisations for customer engagement included Turkey, UK, Ireland, Croatia, and Spain;

Information type used in the postings by Twitter was:

- 59.4% opinion / review (rank four) and 15.7% factual / historical (rank three);
- 24.9% neither opinion / review, nor factual / historical;

Interactivity (the extent to which European destination management organisations use a social medium platform to interact with its users):

- Twitter ranked first with 43.4% degree of interactivity (1,521 posts – 660 interactive and 861 non-interactive);
- Twitter top five European destination management organisations for interactivity included Norway, France, Greece, Austria, and Luxembourg;

Major themes: “natural attractions (48%), cultural attractions (12.5%), historical attractions (8,5%), local cuisine (6.4%), and recreation facilities (5.2%)” representing 80% of all posts of the four social media analysed;

Promotion (“the type of promotional information used by European destination management organisations on social media”): Twitter ranked second with 85.5% promotion-related posts for specific destinations (66%), attractions or hotels (35%), events (34%), own website (23%), restaurants or foods (22%), other social media outlets (9%), and external websites (7%).

CONCLUSIONS

We can state as follows: though a relatively young microblogging and social networking worldwide service, Twitter turns to be one of the most popular social media. Its popularity is supported by the large number of new words whose root is tweet or twit and by the even larger number of Twitter terms.

Its popularity could be explained by its level of homophily or by its “retweet” function. Business and communication are the domains of choice of Twitter.

Twitter is fit for public relations campaigns, for marketing communications, for branding, and for destination management organisations. Destination management organisations using Twitter ranked it first in customer service (for providing compliments, criticisms, and enquiries) and interactivity when compared to Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. All this recommends Twitter as a valuable marketing tool, no matter the field.

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