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Micro-blogging is a form of blogging that allow users to share short communications with others. Beyond text-based messages, these communications may include emoticons, individual images, URLs, or other multimedia content such as video. Due to their brevity, users perceive micro-blog posts to be “quick and simple” to compose (Ehrlich & Shami, 2010, p. 48). Like typical blogs, micro-blogs may be created in a conversational or informal style as consumers often turn to these platforms to share personal anecdotes (Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). For example, users may post micro-blogs to tell followers what is on their mind, crowdsource, share information, or forward news articles (Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). As such micro-blogs mimic real world human dialogue allowing a user to interact with one or more individuals simultaneously regardless of geographical proximity. Unlike typical blogs, however, micro-blogs place severe constraints on the length of an individual post. For example, the text-based platforms Twitter and Sina Weibo each limit individual posts to 140 characters whereas the video-based Vine limits videos to 6.5 seconds in length (Terdiman, 2013). Other examples of micro-blogs include Jaiku, Plurk, and Tumblr (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

In addition to personal interactions, users may turn to micro-blogs in order to communicate with businesses (Dalla Pozza, 2014). In less than one decade, micro-blogging has changed the way business is conducted. Across functional areas, micro-blogging has been incorporated into firms’ internal and external organizational communication practices, fast becoming part of the fabric of how businesses interact with their internal and external customers (Harrington & Miles 2014). It is estimated that Twitter’s advertising revenue will surpass $1.3 billion in 2015 as more and more organizations turn to the platform for digital advertising displays (“Facebook & Twitter,” 2015). From ISIS (Kerr, 2015) to charity: water (Gunellus 2011), organizations across the globe have used micro-blogs as a quick and efficient way to reach people without the need for exorbitant budgets. In 2013, Starbucks beta tested @Tweetacoffee which allowed consumers to send a $5 electronic gift card to friends by using both their friend’s Twitter handle and @Tweetacoffee in a single Tweet (Wasserman, 2013). Within approximately two months, the program was used by 27,000 users and resulted in almost $200,000 in sales.

Messages from for-profit and not-for-profit organizations alike are able to penetrate audiences that may be difficult to reach through traditional media, acting as a catalyst for diffusion of important information (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). Clean Air in London used Twitter’s geo-targeting feature to double its followers and increase awareness for its cause (“Clean Air London,” n.d.). The US-based not-for-profit organization charity: water has successfully used Twitter to highlight offline campaigns, generate over $250,000 in donations, and realize its highest web traffic (Molina, 2013; “Raise Awareness,” n.d.). In fact, charity: water became the first not-for-profit organization to have over one million followers on Twitter (Pace, 2011).
Marketers were the first to adopt Twitter recognizing its value as a communication tool particularly to reach the digital generation – those consumers who were born into a world of digital technology, and who are less accessible through traditional media. Brands such as ESPN and Disney have found success with Twitter as a platform to engender word-of-mouth and facilitate customer-brand engagement. Companies such as Netflix and Best Buy have found success providing customer service via Twitter as they field questions and concerns from customers all over the USA. Via specialized Twitter accounts such as @Netflixhelps and @BestBuySupport, respectively, these firms not only field questions and concerns but also provide updates about system outages and product recalls as appropriate. Whether assistance is available around the clock via @BestBuySupport or on a more limited schedule via @Netflixhelps, users have a virtual platform to request assistance with a range of issues. These Twitter handles are not as replacements for telephone-based or in-person customer service. After approximately four years Best Buy discontinued its @Twelpforce account which it previously relied on to handle technology related customer service inquiries (Vomhof, 2013; Wauters, 2009). Twelpforce was managed by over 3,000 Best Buy employees and sent over 65,000 Tweets during its lifetime (Dugan, 2012; Vomhof, 2013).

But Twitter is not just limited to marketing. Human resource departments have begun to post job openings on the Twitter while recruiters often provide tips about searching for jobs via social media. For instance, via the @ViacomCareers account, one can find job listings from a variety of functional areas as well as links to Viacom’s full blog regarding topics such as scholarship opportunities and challenges faced by women in the workforce. At least 15 job announcements are shared via Twitter every minute with Twitter anticipated to overtake LinkedIn as a source for job seekers within the United States (Beese, 2013).

From a finance perspective, IPOs and stock prices may be announced or discussed via the platform. For instance, Deutsche Bank AG authorized some its investment bankers to operate a work related Twitter account. Financial services company, Wells Fargo has also met with success via Twitter. The firm increased positive sentiment about its brand by 38 percent and incorporated Twitter as its most effective customer service tool (Power, 2012). There are many other examples of various functional areas incorporating Twitter into their strategies, including sales, public relations, and research and development.

Despite the many advantages and opportunities that micro-blogging affords organization there also exists a number of challenges. For instance, the synchronistic feature of micro-blogs coupled with a user’s ability to interact directly with a company representative may create unrealistic service expectations. Further, consumers may use portions of a firm’s Twitter campaign for purposes other than those intended by the firm. To illustrate, both McDonald’s and JPMorgan Chase experienced what is known as hashtag hijacking (Eha, 2013). Consumers and former employees used #McDStories not to submit the heart-warming stories the company sought, but instead to express their disgust with the fast food company (Hill, 2012). And, instead of using #AskJPM to submit questions for a live chat, consumers used the hashtag to voice their criticisms of the firm resulting in an trending topic and negative publicity for the embattled organization. Multinational apparel brand Urban Outfitters lost 17,000 followers after poorly handling a Tweeted accusation about it stealing designs from independent artists (Bhasin, 2012). Finally, after capturing the link to a pornographic image posted to the timeline of American Airlines – with which it was merging – US Airways accidentally used that link in a response to a customer who had a service complaint. The response went out to the airline’s 428,000 followers and was reposted repeatedly before being deleted by the firm less than 30 minutes after the faux pas (Nelson 2014). The public nature of communications also raises issues legal and ethical issues regarding personal privacy. The viral nature of messages can be helpful when spreading positive news but detrimental for corporate controversies.
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Clearly, for many organizations the adoption and use of micro-blogs can be characterized by trial and error. So-called “best practices” are scant and those that do exist are based on minimal and often questionable research. The purpose of this book is to address these concerns by providing practitioners with tools, strategies, and tactics – grounded in empirical research – which they can incorporate into their respective organizations.

This book draws on the collective wisdom of scholars across the world currently conducting research on micro-blogging. Researchers from a variety of disciplines including marketing, human resource management, communications, finance, and legal studies provide valuable insights on specific issues each with a focus on helping strategists understand successes, challenges, and best practices when implementing micro-blogging in their organizations.

Use and Organization of This Book

Throughout this book, insights are presented regarding how Twitter can be integrated within an organization. Cases studies and original research utilizing multinational firms across a variety of industries are presented. Readers will learn from success and failures and the firms. From checklists to frameworks and step-by-step guidelines, users of this text are guided to micro-blogging best practices in several functional areas. The strategic, legal, and ethical implications of adopting Twitter are also highlighted, providing readers with a foundation and framework for adopting Twitter in their own for-profit and not-for-profit businesses. The audience for this reference book includes academics, students, social media strategists, and business professionals. This book may serve as a primary or supplemental text in business classes. It will also provide assistance to functional level managers (e.g., finance, human resources, marketing), social media strategists and small business owners to successfully adopt Twitter into the organization. For ease of use, this book is organized into fourteen chapters categorized into 4 subsections. A brief description of each subsection and chapter follows.

With a focus on Marketing, Section 1 examines how multinational corporations and global brands employ micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter and Sina Weibo to share product/service information, build consumer-brand engagement, and respond to corporate controversy. Through examinations of industries such as automotive, luxury goods, consumer packaged goods, and fast food we explore various strategies for using micro-blogs as a communication media. We also consider factors that predict success.

In Chapter 1 Soboleva, Buron, and Khan identify the challenges created by the increasing use of Twitter by businesses. In particular the authors identify measures that may be used to assess the effectiveness of communications disseminated via Twitter. Insights regarding consumer engagement and successful micro-blogging strategies are presented.

Chapter 2 focuses on the micro-blogging practices of Starbucks in China via Sina Weibo and in the United States via Twitter. Herein, Florenthal and Chao present a case study followed by micro-blogging strategies for multinational firms.

In Chapter 3, Lambert and Vie explore ways micro-blogging can be used to respond to corporate controversies. Following an analysis of how embattled corporations use their official Twitter accounts to respond to controversy, insights into the roles micro-blogging can play in responding to corporate crises are presented.

Ravaglia, Brivio, and Graffigna complete this section in Chapter 4 as they investigate consumer-brand engagement within micro-blogging platforms. Findings suggest that full engagement in an online brand community involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors.
Section 2 focuses on Customer Service. This section examines the use of micro-blogs for customer service delivery. By examining the telecommunications, tourism, and airline industries we investigate customer expectations for social care. In light of Best Buy’s move from @Twelpforce to @BestBuySupport and greater reliance on in-store Geek Squads, the chapters in this section focus on how the adoption of micro-blogging platforms as official customer service channels influence the use of traditional service channels.

Dalla Pozza, Wood, and Burghalter begin this section with their examination of the use of Twitter as a communication channel for customer service interactions in Chapter 5. Micro-blogs such as Twitter influence the channel choice patterns of today’s customers. Findings highlight motivations for using Twitter for service interactions as well as how Twitter impacts traditional customer service channels.

In Chapter 6, Fox and Cowley address how micro-blogging can be integrated into customer service efforts. This chapter explores customer service interaction on micro-blogs by investigating company and customer expectations on Twitter. Though differences exist between customers’ expectations of customer service on Twitter and companies’ understanding of these expectations, managers can use their understanding of these differences to make better decisions about service delivery through Twitter and other social media platforms.

The section on Customer Service concludes with Sotiriadis and Zyl’s discussion of Twitter as a tool for integrated communication with tourism consumers in Chapter 7. The main aim of this chapter is to examine and suggest micro-blogging strategies tourism businesses may implement in order to foster interactive communication via constructive dialogue.

Section 3 of this book is called Managing Capital. In this section we explore the adoption of micro-blogs in the functional areas of finance and human resources. In the domain of finance we examine the growing trend of consumers using micro-blogging platforms to gather news and advice regarding financial assets. In the domain of human resources we examine the legal and ethical implications of using micro-blogs to recruit job candidates and monitor employee conduct. The perceived risks associated with adopting micro-blogs as communication tools are also examined.

In Chapter 8, Pickert and Sandner address Twitter’s popularity as a medium for the management of financial capital via the procurement of financial news and advice. This chapter examines which user characteristics relate to the quality of investment advice. Though results suggest that a significant amount of the information shared is non-useful, misleading, or incorrect, the chapter provides features and characteristics useful in assessing the quality of financial news and advice.

Tryce establishes the need for a strong, corporate-wide social media policy in Chapter 9. After introducing legal considerations regarding the management of human capital in micro-blogs and other social media platforms, the chapter provides guidelines for identifying how this corporate-wide policy should balance an employee’s expectation of privacy against an employer’s legitimate business interests.

In Chapter 10, Petty, Manroop, and Linton explore the use micro-blogs in managing human capital with a focus on recruitment and selection. The chapter addresses how micro-blogs can be incorporated into these practices in order to attain competitive advantage while also being cognizant of legal and ethical dilemmas associated with micro-blogs.

The Managing Capital section concludes with Shabgahi and Cox’s consideration of the risks of internal micro-blogging in the corporate context in Chapter 11. Qualitative analysis of previous literature and in-depth interviews with practitioners uncovered new areas of risk in micro-blogging. The chapter concludes by introducing strategies for mitigating such risks.
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In the book’s fourth and final section, Insights and Metrics, we examine micro-blogs as a data collection tool. Here we delve into how micro-blog posts may be used as source data in practical and academic inquiries. More specifically, we explore and detail the various means by which micro-blogs can be used to obtain marketing knowledge and generate meaningful consumer insights. A selection of data collection methodologies and tools including metrics are described.

In Chapter 12, Dann describes methods and techniques for capturing Twitter timeline data. With an emphasis on swiftly obtaining, examining, and converting data into knowledge, this chapter explains how to retrieve Twitter data from three sources: personally controlled timelines, third party timelines, and ongoing search results. Preliminary analysis that can be performed to discover content creation patterns is also presented.

Next, in Chapter 13, Arrigo examines the role of micro-blogging in improving the market knowledge of firms. This chapter presents an overview of how micro-blogging can draw insights from the market by gathering customer data and accumulating market knowledge.

The book concludes with a content classification framework designed to categorize content from individual and group Twitter activity by Dann in Chapter 14. A pre-existing content classification framework that allows for consistent coding is presented. This chapter also outlines the potential use of the classification framework as a planning tool for guiding content creation.

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