ABSTRACT

The increasing use of Twitter by businesses has created the challenge of how to measure its effectiveness for marketing communications. Using data based on two years of Twitter activity by leading global brands in the Auto, FMCG and Luxury industries, this chapter presents measures which can be used by practitioners and researchers to assess the effectiveness of marketing communications on Twitter. It discusses the factors that predict consumer engagement with organizational tweets, and different Twitter strategies that have been successfully (and less successfully) used by leading global brands. We also consider the implications for marketing with Twitter, for these and for smaller organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years the increasing use of social media by businesses has re-defined the way businesses connect and communicate with customers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Rapp et al., 2013). Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms, attracting around 255 million active monthly users, with around 500 million tweets sent per day (Twitter, 2014a). Twitter users tend to visit the platform more frequently than Facebook users, with 46% being daily visitors and 29% visiting the platform multiple times a day (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

In response to the rise of social media such as Twitter, marketers are actively incorporating social media into their programs, since social media can facilitate customer and user engagement with the organization (e.g. Hollebeek et al., 2014). By the end of 2013, more than 80% of Fortune 500 companies were active
on Twitter, with the top brands averaging 20% follower growth over the last quarter of 2013 (Shively, 2014). But as consumers’ use of social media increases, their expectations also rise (Labrecque, 2014) – adding to the dramatic changes which social media bring to marketing (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).

This chapter discusses the potential for marketing with Twitter, and outlines its key challenges. We propose different measures that can be used to gauge the effectiveness of a Twitter strategy, and using Twitter data from leading global brands from two consecutive years, we discuss tweet features that have been identified as increasing follower engagement. We then examine similarities and differences in the Twitter strategies of these leading global brands and discuss the implications for brand communications on Twitter. Our objectives are to demonstrate how different measures can be used to assess the effectiveness of marketing with Twitter, identify the different Twitter strategies used by leading global brands, and discuss the potential implications for smaller organizations marketing with Twitter.

**Potential Benefits of Marketing with Twitter**

The large audience that can potentially be reached with Twitter makes it a very attractive tool for brands to interact with their customers. Twitter says that its research indicates that users want to hear from organizations on Twitter, as they typically follow five or more brands (Twitter, 2014b). Business executives are said to believe that Twitter has greater potential than other social networks for delivering sales growth (Barnes & Lescault, 2013). Businesses have used Twitter to report financial results (e.g. Alexander & Gentry, 2014) and for firm disclosures in order to increase market liquidity (Blankespoor et al., 2013). Increasingly, however, Twitter is being used both for marketing (e.g. Burton et al., 2013; Yadav et al., 2013), and advertising (e.g. Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014; Lambrecht et al., 2014).

**Increased Audience Reach**

One of the obvious benefits that Twitter offers is exposure to wide audiences. Twitter is the seventh most-visited website in the US (eBizMBA, 2014), and offers the potential to reach a multitude of audiences because its technological features assist in the discovery of posted content. A user does not have to log in to read the tweets of a public Twitter account or ‘Twitter handle’ – the name selected by the user when they register with Twitter. As a result, it is easy to read content and start following someone on Twitter as there is no technical (and often no social) requirement for reciprocity (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The presence and popularity of celebrities on Twitter also draws people to the medium, with many marketers now adding celebrity tweeting to their range of endorsement strategies, increasing the ways that brand content can appear in users’ Twitter feeds (Burkhalter et al., 2014). As we discuss later, other Twitter conventions can also facilitate propagation of Twitter messages, such as the practice of retweeting, which can attract new audiences (boyd et al., 2010) and inclusion of hashtags, which can increase content discovery (Huang et al., 2010). Possibly due to such features, Twitter has become so effective for disseminating content that it has been referred to as a broadcasting network (Shi et al., 2014) – and for newspapers, has been found to be more effective than Facebook for distributing content (Ju et al., 2013).

**A Powerful Additional Channel**

The growth of Twitter has meant that it has become an important part of the marketing mix for both B2B and B2C businesses (e.g. Swani et al., 2014). A Twitter presence generates exposure, can drive
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