MARKETING WITH TWITTER: INVESTIGATING FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TWEETS

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It has not been previously submitted, in part or whole, to any university or institution for any degree, diploma, or other qualification.

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of Twitter by businesses has created the challenge of how organisations can use Twitter most effectively for marketing. Using data across several years of Twitter activity by both leading global brands and a non-profit organisation (NPO), this thesis presents measures that can be used by practitioners and researchers to assess the effectiveness of marketing communications on Twitter. It discusses the factors that predict consumer and stakeholder engagement with organisational tweets, and different Twitter strategies that have been successfully (and less successfully) used by leading global brands and a large non-profit organisation.

The thesis consists of four separate but inter-related papers that have variously been published or accepted for publication. Each paper analyses different aspects of organisational Twitter activity, including an analysis of tweet features that impact on the frequency of retweeting of brands' tweets and examination of reciprocity within the network of an NPO and its corporate partners.

The thesis contributes to the literature by assessing what has been done on Twitter, what works and what does not, and by showing what it is possible to achieve on the platform in terms of effective communications. Firstly, the research evaluates Twitter activity both in commercial organisations and within the network of an NPO and its supporters by analysing their Twitter accounts' activity, follower engagement and tweet structure. The research also compares and contrasts Twitter activity over a two-year period by both commercial brands and an NPO and therefore provides insights into the evolution of Twitter use. Secondly, the research develops and tests a theoretical model that predicts electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on Twitter by assessing the effect of different tweet features on retweet count. The

research also provides an approach to estimate minimum and maximum threshold levels for some tweet features that can be used repeatedly in tweets (e.g., hashtags and photos) and which can thus have a non-linear effect on retweeting. In addition, the research evaluates how consumer involvement with the product category, as represented by different industries, impacts on consumer responses and engagement with brand communications and subsequent eWOM on Twitter. This is important as the findings suggest that different industries need to use different communication strategies, depending on the brand context, in order to be successful on Twitter. Thirdly, the thesis discusses what it is possible to achieve on Twitter, in particular by reviewing how the medium can be used for reciprocal promotion within a network of organisations using co-branding and co-created tweets, even among those who compete. Finally, the thesis discusses implications for organisations using Twitter for marketing communications, and for further research into the use of Twitter for marketing.

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1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines strategies for commercial brands and a non-profit organisation (NPO) to use Twitter to effectively engage with their customers and stakeholders. Specifically, it analyses how organisations can disseminate their Twitter marketing messages by means of retweeting in what has been called a new form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). In addition, the thesis studies Twitter communications within the network of a non-profit organisation and its corporate partners. In a series of four separate but inter-related studies, the thesis evaluates the impact of organisational Twitter messages on user engagement and reciprocity. As discussed in more detail later in the thesis, user engagement is measured by the frequency of users retweeting organisational tweets (and, in the first study, by users favouriting (or liking) tweets). Reciprocity occurs when one party responds to being mentioned or retweeted by another by mentioning them in turn, and/or by retweeting tweets from the account that mentioned and/or retweeted them. This chapter establishes the research context and the purposes and scope of the research, summarises the contribution of the research and provides an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the research

1.1.1 Using social media for marketing

Social media have become an almost inseparable part of human life, playing a significant role in both personal and business worlds. Although the scope of social media is constantly changing as new examples emerge, social media are commonly considered as referring to a variety of online social networks that support a wide range of interests and practices (Ellison, 2007; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Social media

encompass online networking sites, blogs, review sites, photo and video apps and more — each potentially offering its own marketing use. In 2016, nearly 8 in 10 of the 86 per cent of the American public who use the internet (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016), and around three quarters of Australians (Sensis, 2016) maintained profiles on social networks. More importantly, usage of social media is high: 76 per cent of Americans who use the social network Facebook visit the site daily (Greenwood et al., 2016), whereas in Australia it is 50 per cent (Sensis, 2016). Such growth has, in part, been fuelled by the adoption of smart phones that have changed user experiences by simplifying ways to connect and instantly communicate with others.

Apart from the purely personal usage common on social media such as Facebook, social media are used by consumers in ways that are directly relevant to marketers, including helping people discover new products via word-of-mouth (WOM) (e.g., Chatterjee, 2011), and assisting during the purchase decision stage (e.g., Powers, Advincula, Austin, Graiko, & Snyder, 2012; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Customers often use social media brand communities to ask questions and learn about product tips (e.g., Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Such communities can boost loyalty to a brand, as is the case with Starbucks, which uses social media strategies to promote customer engagement (Chua & Banerjee, 2013). Individuals also use social media to publicise their support for causes and donations, which can subsequently trigger others to donate or support the cause. Consumers also influence others in their brand judgements by being a follower of a brand on social media (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012). Social media therefore appear to facilitate individual expression and offer extensive amounts of information about markets and consumers that organisations can use for marketing intelligence (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

In response to the multiple ways that consumers use social media, a recent industry prediction states that marketers will increase their investment in social media marketing by 90 per cent by 2021 (Moorman, 2016). Consistent with this increasing expenditure, it has become common for brands to maintain a presence across several social media platforms, with organisations, on average, maintaining five social media accounts in the hope of achieving multiple goals, from increasing brand awareness to pleasing existing customers (Cameron, 2016). Non-profit organisations are also emerging as active users of social media as they can derive financial benefits from their participation such as through fundraising opportunities (e.g., Saxton & Wang, 2014), and non-financial benefits, such as access to an increased audience and greater feedback (e.g., Kanter & Paine, 2012). Social media have thus dramatically changed marketing by turning it from a traditional 'one-directional bowling approach to a chaotic and interactive game of pinball' (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, & Bloching, 2013, p. 237).

As individuals' use of social media increases, their expectations of interacting with organisations on these media also rise, requiring organisations to carefully design their communications to foster relationships with customers and increase their loyalty (Labrecque, 2014). Brands are expected to be human, relevant, helpful and handy, and social media provide a mechanism through which organisations can demonstrate their authenticity, offer help and solve customer problems faster (Harrysson, Schoder, & Tavakoli, 2016). In particular, one important advantage that social media have provided for organisations is the ability to build dialogic communication with customers — receiving customers' feedback and listening to their conversations to obtain insights to build a better brand. This dialogic communication is an increasingly critical step for organisations to effectively focus on customers' experiences to better manage the customer journey and shopping experience

(Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). To help address customer expectations and for better audience targeting, organisations leverage the personal information consumers voluntarily disclose, both in their public social media profiles and through their actions on social media (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). In addition, mining the material that individuals post online on social media (or 'user generated content') can assist in building offline company financial performance (Schweidel & Moe, 2014). For example, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines uses its social media handles across platforms to provide customer service to both customers and non-customers, and to positively influence the company's corporate reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015). Companies are also using social media platforms for customer relationship management, leading to the new term of 'social CRM', for the use of social media for sales and performance activities (e.g., Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014). However, as with other business activities, there must be a strategy for handling social CRM data in order to achieve meaningful outcomes such as engaging key customers, measuring satisfaction or increasing loyalty (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014).

The importance of social media for communication with customers is shown by recent evidence that claims consumers often experience their most positive brand interactions on social media, and remember these activities more favourably than engagements with organisations on websites, over email, and even in person (Lai, 2016). Brand social media communities tend to attract emotionally connected customers as both followers and contributors. Since emotions drive customer behaviour, it is likely companies will increase their attention to developing their social media networks to promote business growth and profitability (Magids, Zorfas, & Leemon, 2015). Industry research claims that organisational social media activity can bring benefits beyond marketing, including customer care teams that reduce time to resolution, product teams that use social media feedback for product

development, and sales teams that connect with prospective clients and uncover barriers to purchasing (Parrish, Majewski, & Wei-ming, 2016).

In light of the rich potential outcomes of social media use, the challenge of formulating effective social media marketing strategies has captured the attention of both practitioners and academic researchers. Some examples of research include investigations into the profitability of social media coupon campaigns for businesses (Kumar & Rajan, 2012) and into the effect of engaging with high value, influential customers on social media for return on investment (ROI) in marketing (Kumar, Bhaskaran, Mirchandani, & Shah, 2013). Another recent study found that after accounting for the effects of television advertising and e-mail marketing, firm-generated content on social media has a positive and significant effect on customers' spending and cross-buying (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016).

However, although buyers are increasingly using social media to inform their purchase choices, they do not yet rely heavily on social media as a purchase channel. Consequently, the difficulty of establishing a clear association between social media activity and profit often creates a disconnect between the use of social media for marketing and the sales expectations of organisations' senior management (Liousas, Ngo, Parrish, Liu, & Kasia, 2016). More work therefore needs to be done to successfully integrate social media into organisations' overall marketing strategies, including finding ways to engage audiences in cluttered social media environments.

This section has broadly introduced social media and how it is used by marketers. The next section discusses marketing with Twitter, the focus of this thesis.

1.1.2 Marketing with Twitter

1.1.2.1 Popularity of Twitter

Twitter has repeatedly demonstrated its power for disseminating information about diverse activities and world events (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). It has been adopted by various organisations, with more than 70 per cent of the brands from Interbrand's (2013) list of the best global brands achieving more than 100,000 followers (Hitz, 2015), and 86 per cent of Fortune 500 companies maintaining active Twitter accounts (Barnes & Griswold, 2016). These organisations have embraced Twitter for various purposes, such as improving the customer service experience (e.g., Misopoulos, Mitic, Kapoulas, & Karapiperis, 2014) or promoting new products to attract new buyers (Jaring, Bäck, Komssi, & Käki, 2015). Twitter has become a mainstream platform in part due to its high active monthly user base of 313 million users (Twitter, 2016) but also because of the general interest in brands and organisations on Twitter (Smith, 2016). Non-profit organisations have also increasingly used Twitter, albeit initially mostly for broadcasting purposes, despite the dialogical potential of the medium (e.g., Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011).

From its early days Twitter has been actively used by governments and for political communication purposes (e.g., Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2016). It was used to inform, organise and report protest activities in Egypt during the Arab Spring events (Bruns, Highfield, & Burgess, 2013), and has been successfully used for crisis communications, such as during Japan's tsunami (Acar & Muraki, 2011), and for other disaster relief activities coordinated by non-government organisations (Gao, Barbier, & Goolsby, 2011). Most recently Twitter was a powerful tool for political promotion, proving itself capable of influencing election results in the USA (Wells et al., 2016).

Early studies on individuals' use of Twitter identified that users will actively engage with branded content on Twitter (e.g., Jansen et al., 2009; Nitins & Burgess, 2014; Zhang, Jansen, & Chowdhury, 2011), and retweet that content across their networks for information sharing (e.g., Araujo, Neijens, & Vliegenthart, 2015) and/or emotional needs (e.g., Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). The numerous conversations and opinions shared on Twitter between companies and consumers strongly position the platform as an effective communication tool (e.g., Lin & Peña, 2011; Okazaki, Díaz-Martín, Rozano, & Menéndez-Benito, 2015). Customers frequently turn to Twitter to contact the company to solve a product or service related problem (rather than obtain information) and may appear to prefer Twitter to other available channels due to its ease of use and speed, but also because traditional customer service channels (e.g., call centres) fail to live up to their service expectations (Dalla Pozza, Wood, & Burkhalter, 2015). User interactions with brands on Twitter appear to provide both information and emotional value that can lead to long term relationships with consumers through creating and maintaining emotional ties and social bonds (Canhoto & Clark, 2013). However, despite the richness of insights available through analysis of user-generated content and individual behaviour on Twitter, the focus of this thesis is on how Twitter is used by organisations, an area that the next section discusses in more detail.

1.1.2.2 Potential benefits of Twitter for organisations

Twitter's popularity has provided an opportunity for organisations to promote products and services to a large audience of individuals active on Twitter and thereby potentially attract new customers. Despite these obvious opportunities, in common with public relations (PR) activities, the return on investment on Twitter cannot easily be measured. As with PR activities, in most instances Twitter is not used for direct response marketing and, as a result, most common strategies to improve effectiveness of Twitter

communications are centred on increasing follower numbers and increasing the reach of tweets through retweeting. This section therefore summarises different ways in which Twitter communications can help organisations achieve these marketing goals.

1.1.2.2.1 Increased reach to customers

Twitter allows companies to reach large audiences at a relatively low cost (Kwon & Sung, 2011) and, as a result, organisations are often focused on growing the number of followers of their Twitter handle accounts. (To 'follow' a Twitter handle means that tweets posted by the handle are automatically pushed onto the followers' home Twitter feed.) The number of followers thus provides a measure of the reach of organisational messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). A large number of followers of a Twitter handle therefore means that an organisation's message will be received and potentially read by more people. A large following can also increase the chance of a sender's tweets being forwarded or retweeted to followers' own networks, thereby further increasing the audience for tweets posted by the organisation. However, many followers do not actively read the tweets of handles they follow (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2010) and, as a result, a follower count provides only a limited measure of success on Twitter.

Thus, in addition to attempting to achieve high follower numbers, it is important to send messages that will attract attention from followers. Twitter messages can serve diverse communication purposes. For example, an early study indicated that using Twitter to push information to customers helped to increase brand exposure, as many consumers use the medium for information seeking purposes (Jansen et al., 2009). A more recent study demonstrated that company-generated tweets are effective at capturing attention and educating consumers about brands, as well as for encouraging consumers to seek out additional information from other sources (Wood & Burkhalter, 2013). For non-profit

organisations, the use of Twitter facilitates public education purposes and aids in indirect advocacy tactics such as grassroots lobbying (Guo & Saxton, 2014). For example, tweets can help increase awareness of important social marketing activities such as breast cancer prevention (Thackeray, Burton, Giraud-Carrier, Rollins, & Draper, 2013) or domestic violence prevention programs (Ballman, 2015). Thus, a combination of customers searching Twitter for information and organisations posting interesting and relevant tweets is likely to increase the chance of these messages being read and retweeted, thereby increasing the awareness of other consumers about the message and its sender.

1.1.2.2.2 Social listening and service recovery strategies

Due to its popularity, it is not surprising that Twitter is used by individuals to express both negative and positive sentiment about businesses (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). As a result, consumer conversations on Twitter can be mined for marketing research purposes that can reduce the need to directly elicit responses from consumers (Culotta & Cutler, 2016). In addition, companies can potentially improve customer relationships by listening to and handling specific customer complaints on Twitter through service interventions (Ma, 2015). Organisations should, however, develop a robust approach for measuring consumer sentiment on Twitter and regularly test it, since a recent study has demonstrated low levels of agreement between manual and automated analysis of Twitter conversations (Canhoto & Padmanabhan, 2015). Applying a personalised approach by replying to individual customer complaints on Twitter provides companies with much more control over brand related eWOM on the platform (Hewett, Rand, Rust, & van Heerde, 2016). Responding to service failures through highly adapted tweets can also be a very useful tool in countering negative comments from customers (Abney, Pelletier, Ford, & Horky, 2017). The ability to use Twitter to respond to and influence customer communications is

especially important in an age when customers frequently turn to social media to publicly discipline firms for providing low quality service (Gans, Goldfarb, & Lederman, 2017) or for spreading corporate disinformation (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013).

1.1.2.2.3 Enhanced consumer engagement

Consumer engagement has been defined as 'a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-created customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships' (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011, p. 260). As discussed earlier, Twitter is actively used for consumer-to-consumer interactions and for brand to consumer interactions. The level of consumer engagement with organisations on Twitter will depend, however, on consumers' needs and wants at a given time. By sending relevant and interesting tweets, a brand can maintain and/or increase engagement with its followers, and potentially increase engagement with consumers who do not follow the brand, but who discover its tweets, for example when others retweet them, or through a hashtag included in a message.

Consumer engagement, in the form of sharing positive customer experiences or providing objective information about the brand, has been shown to assist in value co-creation and enhancement of pro-organisational attitudes (Okazaki et al., 2015). Brands offering giveaways and sweepstakes on Twitter have been demonstrated to trigger consumer engagement in the form of increased retweets and likes (Vargo, 2016). In one example, a group of organisations in the retail sector actively used relationship maintenance strategies on Twitter, such as replying and being personal in communications with their key audiences, which appeared to facilitate customer brand loyalty (Li, 2015). The strategic use of hashtags has also been found to facilitate message visibility and consequently increase engagement with brand advertising content (Stathopoulou, Borel, Christodoulides, & West, 2017).

In contrast, negative opinions on Twitter can be damaging and may reduce the commercial success of a new product (Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, & Feldhaus, 2014). Such tweets need to be addressed to encourage comments and feedback from customers that can help reclaim the positive image of the company (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Organisational activity on Twitter should not just be of a broadcast nature, however, as the direct promotion of products and services can quell engagement, possibly because of consumer scepticism (Vargo, 2016). Therefore, it is important for organisations to carefully craft and manage consumer interactions on Twitter in order to benefit from their investment in Twitter.

1.1.2.2.4 Facilitation and creation of word of mouth

This section introduces the central focus of this thesis, the benefit of Twitter for facilitating word of mouth through retweeting of organisational messages. Word of mouth is widely recognised to be one of the most powerful ways to disseminate marketing messages (e.g., Buttle, 1998). Academic interest in word of mouth has intensified with the advent of Internet and online communication options, making it one of the most cited topics in the last decade (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).The most widely cited definition of eWOM to date was provided by Hennig-Thurau et.al (2004), defining eWOM as: *'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet'*. However, this definition was created before social media became widely used and does not reflect the various ways in which eWOM can be created and disseminated on social platforms. With the increasing popularity of social media, a number of research studies started exploring eWOM behaviours on popular social media platforms to better understand how to encourage these behaviours (Chu & Kim, 2011; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).

On Twitter, the practice of dissemination of user and firm generated content in the form of retweets provides obvious word of mouth opportunities. Therefore, the definition of brand eWOM on Twitter can be extended beyond the classic definition of eWOM provided by Hennig-Thurau et.al (2004), given above, and characterised as 'a process by which potential, actual or former customers give or pass on an online opinion or statement about a product or company'.

Although many tweets are not brand-related, in an early study analysing the content of tweets posted by individuals, Jansen and colleagues (2009) reported that 19% of the tweets they examined were brand-related, with users expressing opinions about, seeking or providing information on the brand. Another early study concluded that user generated content about brands on Twitter was least likely to be self-promotional in nature and most likely to be brand central, compared to Facebook and YouTube (Smith et al., 2012). An examination of consumer retweets of brands' messages revealed that retweeting is most likely from those who are already positively engaged with brands and who exhibit a high level of brand commitment (Kim, Sung, & Kang, 2014). Such consumer retweeting activity is important for promoting brand awareness with wider groups of customers and potential customers, and so brands can benefit by encouraging favourable word of mouth by current followers retweeting brand messages to their own followers.

Twitter users with high follower numbers such as celebrities, politicians and other influential individuals are likely to be particularly important for the spread of word of mouth on Twitter (Cha et al., 2010), as these users tend to attract the highest numbers of followers (e.g., Marwick & boyd, 2011a). Retweeting by these users is often highly effective due to the general perception of celebrities as credible and trustworthy sources of information, and users' aspirations to connect and build online friendships with these people (Jin & Phua,

2014). When these influencers are mentioned by a brand or retweet brand content, they stimulate more retweets of that brand content, so brands should consider engaging with such influencers to increase the reach of their message beyond their current followers (Araujo, Neijens, & Vliegenthart, 2017). A similar effect was evident with tweets about breast cancer sent by a non-profit organisation that were retweeted or mentioned by celebrities (Thackeray et al., 2013). Perhaps due to these outcomes, industry research has found that when evaluating their social media efforts, marketers are most satisfied with the results of word-of-mouth programs that are enabled via influencers (Liousas, Majewski, Liu, & Egelman, 2016).

Apart from the involvement of celebrities and individuals in creating brand eWOM on Twitter, organisations themselves can create content on Twitter that can facilitate word of mouth. For example, when an organisation increases its Twitter activity and posts different content, users' engagement and involvement with the brand has been found to increase (Ceballos, Crespo, & Cousté, 2016) and facilitate positive outcomes. For example, a media company's tweets about its television shows boosted viewing of these shows, demonstrating the potential positive impact of organisational tweeting on business performance (Gong, Zhang, Zhao, & Jiang, in press). Similarly, non-profit organisations can successfully use Twitter for their advocacy communications, especially in an indirect way (e.g., for public education, rather than for direct lobbying), to dramatically increase the number of 'voices' involved in the non-profit organisation's efforts and, as a result, decentralise advocacy work (Guo & Saxton, 2014).

Given the positive potential of retweeting for consumer engagement and reach, organisations should actively 'seed' eWOM and monitor and respond to consumer eWOM. This approach will help maximise the potential of Twitter in the current environment, where consumer and company interactions are increasingly growing complex (Hewett et al., 2016).

Active brand participation on Twitter increases the exposure and awareness of a brand, which in turn can lead to greater probability of a product being considered, purchased and promoted by consumers (Liu & Lopez, 2016). The next section discusses how various Twitter features can enhance the success of communications on the medium, as measured by the frequency of a brand's marketing message being retweeted to other networks on Twitter.

1.1.2.3 Measuring success on Twitter

Success in using Twitter can be assessed through a number of different measures that have been discussed both in academic literature (e.g., Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013; Burton, Dadich, & Soboleva, 2013) and industry reports (e.g., Bullas, 2012; Parrish & Truog, 2011). This section lists key measures of marketing success on Twitter and discusses why each is important. The section also offers an approach that can be used to facilitate successful organisational communications on the platform. Subsequent chapters present in detail how these measures can be used to assess the strategic approach of organisations to Twitter communications as part of their social media marketing plans.

1.1.2.3.1 Followers

A Twitter handle's popularity, as measured by the number of its followers, is the most obvious measure that can reveal whether a brand's marketing on Twitter is worthwhile. In response, businesses often focus on gaining a large number of followers and monitoring the frequency of their comments, driven by a traditional "reach and frequency" framework (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Attracting a large number of Twitter followers brings several advantages. For example, having a strong base of active Twitter followers, especially influential ones, is important because a community of followers can help leverage various marketing objectives of a company, such as increasing traffic to its website or popularising its events. An increased number of followers also mean that there will be more recipients for a

sender's tweets, increasing the likelihood of retweeting of organisational tweets that in turn can bring a tweet to the attention of the secondary audience of followers of those who retweet the tweet. This effect is highly desirable for organisations, as it allows dissemination of its messages at no cost and in the most authentic way possible, and people are more likely to be influenced by those they know and connect with.

A large follower base can also signal that a Twitter handle is influential (Kwak et al., 2010), which can trigger even more attention from other users due to the higher visibility of a widely-followed handle. Establishing a large follower base, however, requires time and an interactive, one-to-one and reciprocal approach (Aleti, Harrigan, Cheong, & Turner, 2016). As a result, organisations sometimes use services that offer to buy followers for a fee (Stringhini, Egele, Kruegel, & Vigna, 2012). However, such an approach may backfire as buying followers has been associated with compromised Twitter profiles due to hacking and unwanted behaviours in the form of bot spam campaigns (Stringhini et al., 2012; Thomas, McCoy, Grier, Kolcz, & Paxson, 2013). Another problem with focusing on increasing follower numbers is that many followers, as discussed previously, are likely to be inactive or passive consumers of Twitter content (Romero, Galuba, Asur, & Huberman, 2011).

Despite its limitations as a measure of success, a higher number of followers signals a larger reach for organisational messages and, as a result, the number of followers is used in the four studies that form the basis of this thesis. The research featured in Chapter 2 presents findings on changes in the number of brands' followers over a 12-month period across different industries, and the research presented in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 uses number of followers to measure the reach of the communications of a non-profit organisation on Twitter. The research presented in Chapter 5 uses the number of followers as a control variable in examining what predicts retweeting of an organisational tweet.

1.1.2.3.2 Retweets

The second key measure of marketing success on Twitter is the popularity of a tweet, as measured by its retweet count. Retweeting is important for two reasons: firstly, retweeting enables message propagation beyond the original audience of the tweet (those who already follow a sender) to those who do not follow the sender of the tweet, which can bring potential benefits to the sender in the form of new followers or traffic to its profile page or its website. Secondly, retweeting signals interest and engagement from current followers since they are interacting with the tweet, which suggests an active audience who can act as supporters and advocates of the sender's Twitter activity. Research has demonstrated that a consumer who forwards a tweet is at some level engaged: they have received, read the tweet, possibly modified it and endorsed it to their contacts, and thus become involved in word of mouth communications related to the brand (e.g., Alboqami et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2014). Therefore, the frequency of retweeting provides a measure of influence by the brand. For example, early research suggested that retweeting can be seen as a way to express appreciation and interest in a tweet (Kwak, Chun, & Moon, 2011) and more recently, retweets have been used to determine the effectiveness of Starbucks' social media strategy (Taecharungroj, 2016). Twitter's own research claims that with every retweet users drive earned media (i.e. publicity through non-paid efforts) for businesses that can have a large impact on ROI over time (Schreiner, 2013).

However, it is still not entirely clear what causes consumers to engage in word of mouth activity through retweeting. For example, early marketing research stated that product and message involvement were two of the main motivations for consumers to talk about a product or service (Dichter, 1966). Consistent with that research and a rich subsequent literature on the effects of consumer involvement (e.g., Celsi & Olson, 1988; Fortin &

Dholakia, 2005; Holmes & Crocker, 1987), a recent study examining social media use in tourism-related decisions found that involvement is a predictor of engagement with tourism brands on social media (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). However, there is limited evidence available on the effect of different levels of consumer involvement with brands on the frequency of retweeting. The study in Chapter 2, in which retweet rates of tweets sent by different industries are analysed over a two year period, addresses this area. The research presented in Chapter 3 uses retweeting as a measure of co-created communications within a non-profit organisation and its network of corporate sponsors. Chapter 4 presents a study that analyses the content of retweets in the context of a non-profit organisation's promotion of its financial partners, and the research featured in Chapter 5 develops and tests a model assessing the effect of different tweet features contained in organsational tweets on the frequency of retweeting of those tweets.

1.1.2.3.3 Favourites

An early measure of the success of tweets was the 'favourite' button on Twitter – an icon that users clicked on to 'favour' or 'like' a tweet. Early research suggested that favouriting was typically used for personal reference (i.e. as a form of bookmarking) and similar to retweeting, can be seen as a way to express appreciation and interest in a tweet (Kwak et al., 2011). Favouriting a tweet has also been suggested to be more cognitively demanding than liking something on Facebook or retweeting (Alhabash & McAlister, 2014). However, recently this feature has changed. Before 2015, favouriting a tweet was done by clicking a star icon underneath the tweet, but the star icon has now been replaced with a heart icon, and the act of favouriting is now referred to as 'liking'. The change is probably because Twitter has suggested that the star button was confusing to many users, stating: 'You might like a lot of things, but not everything can be your favorite'(Kumar, 2015a). Unlike

retweeting, favouriting does not extend the reach of a tweet to the user's own network. However favouriting does measure user engagement to some degree, which is why it has been explored in some early studies (e.g., Burton & Soboleva, 2011; Meier, Elsweiler, & Wilson, 2014). The research presented in Chapter 2 therefore examines the frequency of favouriting of tweets posted by brands from different industries over a two-year period. The findings reveal that favouriting is highly correlated with retweeting, which is consistent with previous research that found that the reasons for favouriting are similar to those for retweeting (e.g., boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Meier et al., 2014). In addition, as discussed above, favouriting is less public in nature and, as a result, this measure was not used in the later studies, which focussed on retweeting as a better measure of followers' engagement with organisational tweets.

1.1.2.3.4 Listing

Another early measure of the success on Twitter was the frequency that a Twitter handle was 'listed'. (Lists represent groups of Twitter handles organised by theme/topic that can be subscribed to by other users (Twitter, 2012)). Viewing a list timeline will feature a stream of tweets from only the accounts on that list, thus making it easy to see / access specific information on Twitter. Twitter handle listing can be used as a form of bookmarking (Kang & Lerman, 2012) and a form of recommendation when deciding which Twitter accounts to follow (e.g. Krutkam, Saikeaw, & Chaosakul, 2010). One study has evaluated the engagement with a Twitter handle based on the number of times it appeared on other users' lists, since listing provides public endorsement of a Twitter account (Burton et al., 2013). Consequently, the research presented in Chapter 2 examines the frequency of listing of different brands' Twitter accounts over a two-year period. However, the study found that the frequency of listing is not a useful measure of user engagement in comparison to followers,

retweeting and favouriting, as the frequency of listing increased in any meaningful way in only one industry, despite significant increases in the number of followers for all industries. This may be because not all Twitter lists are public and only a very small percentage of Twitter users list Twitter handles (Culotta, 2016). As a result, Twitter listing was not used in the later studies, which focussed on retweeting as a better measure of followers' engagement with organisational tweets.

1.1.2.4 Mechanisms for facilitating marketing success on Twitter

This section introduces various approaches that can facilitate organisational success on Twitter by improving one or more of the different measures of success presented above. These approaches are introduced only briefly here because they are discussed in more detail in the studies presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. The approaches include the use of tweet features that may increase the likelihood that a tweet will be noticed and/or found and, as a result, that a Twitter user will interact with the tweet (for example by retweeting or liking it).

1.1.2.4.1 Hashtags

Hashtags are created by using a specific keyword or phrase prefixed by the hashtag symbol (e.g., #followfriday). Hashtagged words and phrases are clickable and help a user find tweets of interest to them, as clicking on a hashtag takes the user to a feed with all tweets that contain the same hashtag. Hashtagged tweets therefore increase discoverability of content. Hashtags also increase Twitter conversations around specific topics, as any user can contribute their commentary to the stream of conversation that includes a particular hashtag (Huang, Thornton, & Efthimiadis, 2010). Hashtags may better connect marketing messages to larger audiences, for example, by targeting specific customer segments through keywords associated with their behaviour (e.g., #vegan) (Stern, 2017). The inclusion of a hashtag in a

tweet has also been shown to increase the retweet rate of tweets (e.g., Nagarajan, Purohit, & Sheth, 2010; Petrovic, Osborne, & Lavrenko, 2011; Suh, Hong, Pirolli, & Chi, 2010).

Given the evidence that the use of hashtags can increase retweet frequency, this feature is examined in more detail in this thesis. The research presented in Chapter 2 analyses the use of hashtags by different industries over a two-year period, and examines differences in the retweet rate of tweets with and without different tweet features, including hashtags. The study featured in Chapter 5 uses the number of hashtags in brand tweets as one of a number of variables included in a model assessing retweeting of organisational messages.

1.1.2.4.2 Mentions

A mention is a reference to another account's @username in a tweet. It is used to address a particular user (who is notified when a message mentioning their username is posted). Mentions often prompt a conversation, especially when consumers mention brands in a positive context, since brands are then likely to retweet the tweet (boyd et al., 2010) [1]. As with hashtags, mentions indicate a user's public interactions relative to specific interests (Lim & Datta, 2016). Mentions are also frequently used to attract the attention of influential users or celebrities (e.g., Adams, 2016; Cha et al., 2010). In response, the mentioned celebrity may sometimes retweet the message to their (typically large) network of followers, boosting the tweet's reach to a large new audience, perhaps the most desirable outcome for those who initiated the mention. In addition, tweets are more likely to be retweeted once they have been retweeted by an influential person such as a celebrity (e.g., Araujo et al., 2017). However, 'celebrity-mentioning' activity also increases the likelihood of a tweet getting the attention of those who receive it if they are interested in the mentioned celebrity.

[1] A @username positioned at the start of a tweet and which is sent in response to another tweet is called a reply and is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Due to the potential effect of mentions on audience engagement and the frequency of retweeting, this tweet feature is reviewed in more detail in the four studies that form the basis of the thesis.

The study in Chapter 2 examines and compares the use of mentions posted over a two-year period by brands from different industries, and analyses the effect of mentions on retweet count. The research presented in Chapters 3 and 4 analyses mentions data to assess the extent of a non-profit organisation's engagement with its network of financial partners. The study in Chapter 5 uses the number of mentions in brand tweets as one of a number of variables to test what predicts the frequency of retweeting of organisational messages on Twitter.

1.1.2.4.3 Replies

A reply is a response to another person's tweet, and can be initiated by clicking on a reply arrow icon underneath a tweet in order to establish a conversation. Such conversations/discourse can be public or less public in nature. Replies are usually seen only by the sender and the recipient, though they are also visible to anyone who follows both the sender and the recipient. Replies can also be completely public (and therefore visible to everyone) if the reply references an addressee's Twitter handle at the beginning of a stand-alone message (i.e. one that is not created in reply to another tweet), or if the sender of a reply retweets it himself/herself (Sargent, 2016). (Replies used to be visible to everyone if a user put a dot in front of the @ sign in a reply (a 'dot-at-reply') but this mechanism has now been phased out (Meyer, 2016).) Replies can facilitate consumer engagement with a company's tweets as users can directly respond to each other. For example, service interactions with customers through replies can be an effective method to use Twitter, especially if the replies are designed to help customers resolve their service issues (Abney et al., 2017). Frequent use

of replies and being personal in one to one communications with customers has also been shown to facilitate customer brand loyalty (Li, 2015).

Given the potential effect of replies on audience engagement with a tweet, the study presented in Chapter 2 examines and compares the use of replies by brands from different industries in order to analyse the extent of brands' engagement with their followers and also assesses how public replies (at the time of the research, through dot-at-replies) impact on retweeting frequency. The paper presented in Chapter 4 reviews a non-profit organisation's replies that contain references to its corporate partners in order to assess the extent of the non-profit organisation's efforts to recognise and respond to its supporters on Twitter.

1.1.2.4.4 URL links

Twitter users can include links to external websites and other content in their tweets. The presence of a uniform resource locator (URL) link (or hyperlink/weblink) in a tweet means that those who receive the tweet have access to extra information if they click on the URL link, which may therefore prompt recipients to interact with the message. Brands often use URL links in tweets to provide easy access to longer articles, blogs or company website pages that they think tweet recipients may be interested in. For companies that offer high involvement products, consumers often perform extensive information search (Gu, Park, & Konana, 2012), and therefore such consumers may potentially prefer tweets with URL links. Tweets with URL links have been found to be more likely to be retweeted (Suh et al., 2010), possibly because these tweets are considered more informative (Sedhai & Sun, 2014) and more interesting than non-hyperlinked tweets (Alonso, Carson, Gerster, Ji, & Nabar, 2010).

Early research demonstrated that tweets with URL links, on average, were retweeted more often (e.g., Naveed, Gottron, Kunegis, & Alhadi, 2011; Suh et al., 2010). Other recent research reports that tweets with URL links appear to achieve increased customer attention

compared to tweets without URL links, and as a consequence, these tweets are more likely to be favourited or retweeted (Alboqami et al., 2015). However, other studies have reported that the inclusion of a URL in organisational tweets did not increase retweeting (Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2012; Saxton, Niyirora, Guo, & Waters, 2015). These contradictory findings may in part be explained by the changing format and function of a URL link in a tweet. For example, until recently, the presence of a URL link in a tweet signified a link to any one of a photo, video or an external website. In addition, the display of a URL link on Twitter has evolved with display in different formats. For example, initially Twitter posted full references to the URL of the destination website, thereby allowing users to see the full website address. This practice, however, used to take most of a tweet's limited 140 characters. Since 2011, Twitter has offered an automatic link shortening service which may have decreased users' interest in clicking on a link (since the destination website is obscured) and thus decrease their engagement with that tweet. Still more recent updates on Twitter have streamlined the format and look of URL links in tweets and also substituted URL links to photos and/or videos with actual components of these media, which typically now expand within a tweet. It is possible that these changes may have resulted in users becoming less engaged with tweets that have URL links and, as a result, the frequency of retweeting such tweets may have decreased.

Despite the inconsistent findings on the impact of URL links on users' engagement with tweets and users' likelihood of retweeting tweets with URL links, the thesis explores the role of this tweet feature in more detail. The research presented in Chapter 2 analyses the use of URL links by brands from different industries in order to evaluate whether this tweet feature can increase followers' engagement with tweets, as measured by increased frequency of retweeting. The study in Chapter 5 examines the effect of URL links in brand tweets,

together with other tweet features, to test what predicts retweeting of organisational messages on Twitter, and how the effects of URL links (and other features) vary across different industry groups representing different levels of consumer involvement.

1.1.2.4.5 Embedded visual content

Twitter users can post tweets that include photos and videos, however, as reflected in the discussion above, how these media are displayed in a tweet has changed over time. Previously, a user had to click on a URL link in a tweet and a photo or video would open in a new window. Since late 2013, Twitter has enabled users to embed photos and videos in a tweet, so instead of the user having to leave Twitter, the tweet itself expands to show the content (Cooper, 2013). This change added visual appeal to brand Twitter messages, making their content more emotion-evoking and action-inducing (Taecharungroj, 2016). In response, the inclusion of visual content in tweets has become common, partly also due to the widespread use of Twitter's mobile application, which allows to easily upload camera images (Prøitz, 2017).

In research pre-dating Twitter, substantial literature supports the positive impact of visual content (such as photos) on marketing communications in terms of improving recall (e.g., Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991), increasing the potential for attitude change (Rossiter & Percy, 1980) and influencing consumer persuasion (e.g., McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). Consistent with these effects, the inclusion of images in tweets has been shown to draw more attention from consumers than purely text-based messages for utilitarian products (Hoffman & Daugherty, 2013). Capturing and using clever imagery has been reported to help companies in increasing user engagement with their organic (non-paid) content through such actions as likes, shares, retweets and comments (Miner, 2017). Tweets with videos have been shown to add to the richness of content and help marketers with different tasks from

promotion to problem resolution (Leek, Canning, & Houghton, 2016). In addition, tweets with images and video have been found to aid in the spread of rumours about disasters through increased retweeting (Liu, Burton-Jones, & Xu, 2014), further supporting the strong impact of visual content in tweets on user intention to forward such messages to their networks.

Given the powerful potential of embedded visual content in tweets to increase user engagement with tweets, the thesis examines the impact of photos and video in more detail in the research presented in Chapters 2 and 5. The study contained in Chapter 2 coded a sample of brand tweets with URL links to examine the presence of photos and video content in these links. Tweets that contained photo and video links were then analysed in terms of their impact on user engagement as measured by the retweet frequency of such tweets. The study presented in Chapter 5 assesses the effect of the number of photos (as multiple photos can be posted in a single tweet) and the presence of video in tweets on retweeting of organisational messages.

1.1.2.4.6 Interesting Content

The extent to which a message is interesting, or its 'interestingness', is often rated as the most important component of a message (Hidi, Baird, & Hildyard, 1982). While interestingness is heavily dependent on the context, it can be defined as something that is noticed and followed by the reader because it has the characteristics of unexpectedness and/or personal relatedness (Schank, 1979).

In an advertising environment, interesting writing/content can improve recall and create favourable associations (Armstrong, 2010). For example, the use of wordplay in print advertisements leads to more liking for the ad, a more positive brand attitude, and enhanced memorability (McQuarrie & Mick, 1992). In an online environment, the interestingness of

word-of-mouth messages has a positive effect on acceptance of word-of-mouth (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007) and a positive correlation with the likelihood of forwarding those messages (Huang, Cai, Tsang, & Zhou, 2011).

Interestingness may stem from both the way the message is crafted (Abruzzini, 1967) and from the subject that is being discussed. For instance, in online conversations more interesting products and brands are mentioned more frequently than less interesting ones (Berger & Milkman, 2012). A message's interestingness may also be related to its perceived relevance for the reader (Muehling, Stoltman, & Grossbart, 1990). For example, the offline reputation of a tweet sender (e.g., a celebrity) can act as a signal for distinguishing interesting tweets (Yang, Lee, Lee, & Rim, 2012) and the presence of a URL link in a tweet has also been associated with interesting content (Alonso et al., 2010). Tips and advice are considered to be practically useful information by consumers (Coursaris, Van Osch, & Balogh, 2013) and brand messages that contain practical and useful information appear to foster retweets (Vargo, 2016), reinforcing that interesting content is dependent on the relevance and the relatedness of the tweet to a user's state of mind or circumstances. According to uses and gratifications theory, the use of internet and online technologies satisfies needs for self-promotion, image and seeking information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo (2004) propose five motivations that explain why people join and participate in virtual communities (such as a Twitter network) — purposive value, self-discovery, social enhancement maintaining interpersonal connectivity, and entertainment value — further highlighting the importance of interestingness in tweets. Interesting messages can satisfy these various values and ultimately impact on desire to continue to follow Twitter accounts (Zhao, Su, & Hua, 2016).

Structure and content-based features of tweets such as 'well-formedness' and a focus on factuality also appear to contribute to the notion of interesting content in Twitter (e.g., André, Bernstein, & Luther, 2012; Naveed et al., 2011). Finally, captivating visual content in brand tweets (such as filtered images that are modified to create interesting presentations for audiences) evokes emotions that, in turn, can encourage retweeting of such messages (Taecharungroj, 2016).

The effect of message content interestingness may depend on the individual's involvement with the product and/or brand. For example, revision of writing in a history textbook in order to make it more interesting has been found to make the text more comprehensible and more memorable in the low involvement situation of high-school students (Graves et al., 1988), which suggests that interestingness may have a positive effect on message processing under such conditions. In contrast, the level of message interestingness may not need to be high for more involved consumers to interact with a tweet. For example, advertisements for familiar brands may already be interesting and engaging because the audience is able to associate current information with previously acquired knowledge about the brand (Alwitt, 2000). Furthermore, highly involved consumers are likely to carefully evaluate message content without additional stimulation through the style of the message, which may distract from processing an advertising claim (Toncar & Munch, 2001). Thus, the effect of interestingness in tweets may also depend on consumer involvement with the brand and is likely to vary based on consumer involvement.

Given the potential impact of interesting tweet content for increasing retweeting, this concept is examined in more detail in this thesis. For example, the research presented in Chapter 2 analyses the use of tweet content features such as a retweet call to action, and the use of questions and apologies by brands from different industries over a two-year period.

The study examines differences in the retweet rate of tweets with and without these tweet features and discusses how the inclusion of these different tweet content features impacts on follower engagement, as measured by the frequency of retweeting. In addition, the research compares the effect of these tweet features across different industries representing different levels of consumer involvement. The study contained in Chapter 4 uses content analysis of a non-profit organisation's retweets of tweets posted by its corporate partners, and discusses how retweeting messages can be relevant to marketing objectives. This content analysis approach allows assessment of the interestingness and relevance of a message can influence its propagation on Twitter. The study presented in Chapter 5 uses the presence of a retweet call to action and the word 'please' in brand tweets, together with other tweet features, to test what predicts the frequency of retweeting of organisational tweets.

1.1.2.4.7 Advertising on Twitter

Twitter introduced advertising options in early 2011 (Twitter, 2016) with the goal of monetising its network and ultimately enhancing consumer engagement through social advertising. This move, along with Facebook, LinkedIn and Snapchat advertising options, has led to more than $US20 billion dollars being spent on social media advertising since 2015, which is estimated to constitute more than 16 per cent of total digital marketing spending by 2017 (eMarketer, 2015). In the first half of 2016, social media marketers stated that Twitter was second after Facebook in delivering the best return on investment from marketing and advertising activity (eMarketer, 2016). However, academic research on the value of advertising on Twitter is still limited and provides mixed evidence: some warn big brands not to use Twitter's advertising options due to the risk of lowering customers' opinion about the brand (Wood & Burkhalter, 2013), while others show that consumers often ignore promoted content and therefore do not respond differently to advertising tweets when compared to non-

paid messages (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016). There may, however, be variation in the responses of different users to advertising on Twitter. A psychographic approach exploring users' responsiveness to Twitter advertising found that active users of the platform demonstrated highest engagement with Twitter ads (Campbell, Ferraro, & Sands, 2014). There may also be differences across markets: a recent demographically focused study found that Twitter advertising is the most accepted format for advertising for the millennial generation in Mexico (Murillo, Merino, & Núñez, 2016).

Twitter advertisements can be set up as 'Promoted Tweets', 'Promoted Accounts' or 'Promoted Trends', with each helping advertisers to focus on customers with specific interests and in certain geographical locations (Twitter, 2017a). Promoted tweets are tweets purchased by advertisers who want to reach a specific group of Twitter users based on their interests, and are only shown to targeted users and/or current followers of an advertiser. These tweets are marked as promoted. 'Promoted accounts' is a form of advertising where Twitter accounts/handles pay Twitter for their handle to be recommended to people who don't currently follow it, but who may find it useful based on their interests. Likewise, these accounts are labelled as promoted. 'Promoted trends' is an advertising feature that allows marketers to promote various trends to users that are organised around time, context and events. These trends appear at the top of the trending topics list on Twitter and are also clearly identified as promoted. The use of any of those forms of advertising on Twitter is consistent with evidence that targeted advertising appears to be a powerful tool for allowing marketers to interact with highly relevant groups of customers (Tucker, 2014). Targeting and personalisation is usually based on any information available about users – for example their browsing behaviours and/or personal information available online. Therefore, promoted tweets, accounts and/or trends can (at least in theory) help brands reach new audiences that

do not already follow them (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016), and as a result, potentially increase follower numbers, engagement and retweet rates from these followers.

Given the potential for promoted tweets to push messages to selected audiences, this thesis examines the impact of promoted tweets in more detail in the research presented in Chapter 5. The research assesses the effect of promoted tweets in terms of their impact on the frequency of retweeting of an organisational tweet. Promoted accounts and promoted trends are not included in this analysis as at the time of data collection there was no way to download and identify these features.

1.1.2.5 The evolving nature of Twitter

In addition to the mechanisms discussed above that can facilitate marketing success on Twitter, any research on the medium needs to recognise the evolving nature of Twitter, and potential changes in consumer responses to tweet design over time. For example, Twitter continuously strives to optimise the user experience on its platform due to the fast pace of the social network industry, and also because of Twitter's decision to become a public company (DePillis, 2013). Public listing required Twitter to deal with different goals: improving its interface, being innovative and finding ways to monetise its network. Consequently, ongoing changes on Twitter have the potential to both positively and negatively impact on the user experience on Twitter. For example, Twitter's recent move to keep users on the platform longer by adding new features such as 'While you Were Away' (which is designed to show tweets that the user missed when they were offline) created a backlash as it was believed to take away the 'real-time' feeling of Twitter (Simpson, 2016). Another new feature called 'Moments' was designed to re-engage Twitter's user base (and bury questionable and abusive content) by showing carefully curated daily content, but was criticised as interfering with the usual sequential ordering of tweets by time. Perhaps, as a result, recent industry research has

reported that despite high adoption of Twitter in the Asia Pacific region, the outcome of marketing on the platform falls short of marketers' expectations (Teo et al., 2016). Thus, due to the ongoing changes and innovations on Twitter, there is a risk that research on Twitter use can quickly become out of date as both the platform design and user practices change.

Reflecting the above discussion on the evolving nature of Twitter, this thesis presents two studies that collected tweet data posted by both commercial brands and a non-profit organisation over a four-year period (between 2012 and 2016). The study contained in Chapter 2 compares and contrasts brands' use of Twitter features over the course of two years (2013-2014). The research presented in Chapter 4 examines the use of Twitter by an NPO over another two-year period (2015-2016). In addition, the study presented in Chapter 5 builds on the approach used in the study in Chapter 2 and incorporates new tweet features into a model predicting what impacts on the frequency of retweeting, as well as comparing results for different industries representing different levels of consumer involvement.

1.2 Gaps in the literature

Despite the rapidly growing scholarly interest and body of research on the use and impact of social media on individuals and institutions, relatively limited research is available on the use of Twitter for marketing communications. This section identifies research gaps in this area, which provide the research focus for the thesis.

Firstly, despite extensive research on the use of Twitter, much of the research lacks a theoretical focus. In response, the book chapter, presented in Chapter 2, provides a detailed overview of how social media and specifically Twitter can help brands amplify their marketing efforts using various strategies. The book chapter draws on marketing theory in the areas of interactivity, service intervention and word of mouth communications to identify a

model of Twitter measures of success using several categories: account/handle activity, follower engagement, account engagement with the network and tweet structure. Measures of account activity, account engagement and tweet structure categories are then used to predict the frequency of retweeting of organisational tweets, and this approach is later developed into a more comprehensive model in the study presented in Chapter 5.

Secondly, given the rapid evolution of the Twitter platform in the past few years, it is important to assess if and how organisational use of Twitter changes over time. However, there is little research available on this topic, with the majority of Twitter studies examining the antecedents of user generated content on Twitter. The book chapter presented in Chapter 2 addresses this area by comparing the use of Twitter features by global brands over a two-year period. This analysis helps to uncover the decreasing use of some tweet features (such as listing) and the complexity in assessing the impact on consumer engagement of other tweet features (such as weblinks and mentions). In addition, the study demonstrates the importance of the reach and frequency of posts on Twitter that later informs the model predicting retweeting of Twitter messages presented in Chapter 5. The research presented in Chapter 4 also examines the changing use of Twitter for relationship-building communications between an NPO and its corporate partners, highlighting the importance of proactive use of the medium and its growing opportunities for personalising marketing communications.

Thirdly, there is little research that examines how the use of Twitter may vary across industries, and whether engagement with organisational tweets varies with different levels of consumer involvement. The book chapter presented in Chapter 2 addresses this area, contrasting varying consumer responses (in the form of retweeting) to tweets posted by Luxury, Automotive and FMCG brands and based on this analysis, discusses how Twitter strategies depend on the brand context, including, though not limited to, the industry. The

research contained in Chapter 5 extends the work done in Chapter 2 and provides detailed insights into what tweet features are effective for different industries in terms of increasing retweeting of brands' messages.

Finally, there is no research available on how Twitter can be used by dyads of not-for profit and for-profit organisations to build mutual brand value. The research presented in Chapter 3 therefore examines how a US-based NPO and its network of corporate partners use Twitter to increase awareness of the cause and its corporate social responsibility (CSR) partnerships. The study presented in Chapter 4 uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to assess how the medium is used by the NPO for relationship-building communications and therefore extends research into how Twitter networks can be used for reciprocal promotion purposes.

1.3 Research objectives

In response to the gaps in the literature discussed above, the thesis has three key objectives. Firstly, the research aims to identify factors associated with increasing consumer engagement and the frequency of retweeting of organisational tweets by analysing different tweet features contained in the tweets posted by global brands over time. Better understanding of the factors that improve organisational interactions with individuals on Twitter should clarify important issues, such as the potential of the platform for brand building and seeding word-of-mouth. The book chapter presented in Chapter 2 and the paper presented in Chapter 5 address this objective in detail. For example, Chapter 2 offers a framework for evaluating different tweet features that influence organisational communications on Twitter. Chapter 5 further develops the framework into a model that predicts electronic word-of-mouth in the form of retweets. In addition, the research examines the impact of consumer involvement on the probability of a tweet being retweeted. Assessing

the value of Twitter for establishing a relationship with a customer and for disseminating information to wider networks of users through retweeting is especially critical at a time when social media are significantly impacting on consumer behaviour. The model tested in the paper that is presented in Chapter 5 allows for consumer involvement (as represented by tweets from different industries) and assesses how consumer involvement can impact on engagement with brand communications and subsequent eWOM on Twitter.

Secondly, the study analyses Twitter communications within the network of an organisation and its partners by comparing and contrasting tweets between a non-profit organisation and its sponsoring partners. The paper presented in Chapter 3 examines the presence of reciprocity in communications between the NPO and its partners as well as amongst network partners through analysis of mentions and co-branded and co-created tweets and retweets. The paper contained in Chapter 4 examines the evolution of a non-profit organisation's practice in terms of proactive mentioning of its partners and through content analysis of the non-profit's retweets of partners' tweets. Studying dyadic communication within a Twitter network should assist both the academic community and marketing practitioners in developing social media strategies that leverage such approaches for co-branding, for example, through endorsement of partners and celebrities, and, for sponsoring partners, enable coopetition by partnering with competitors.

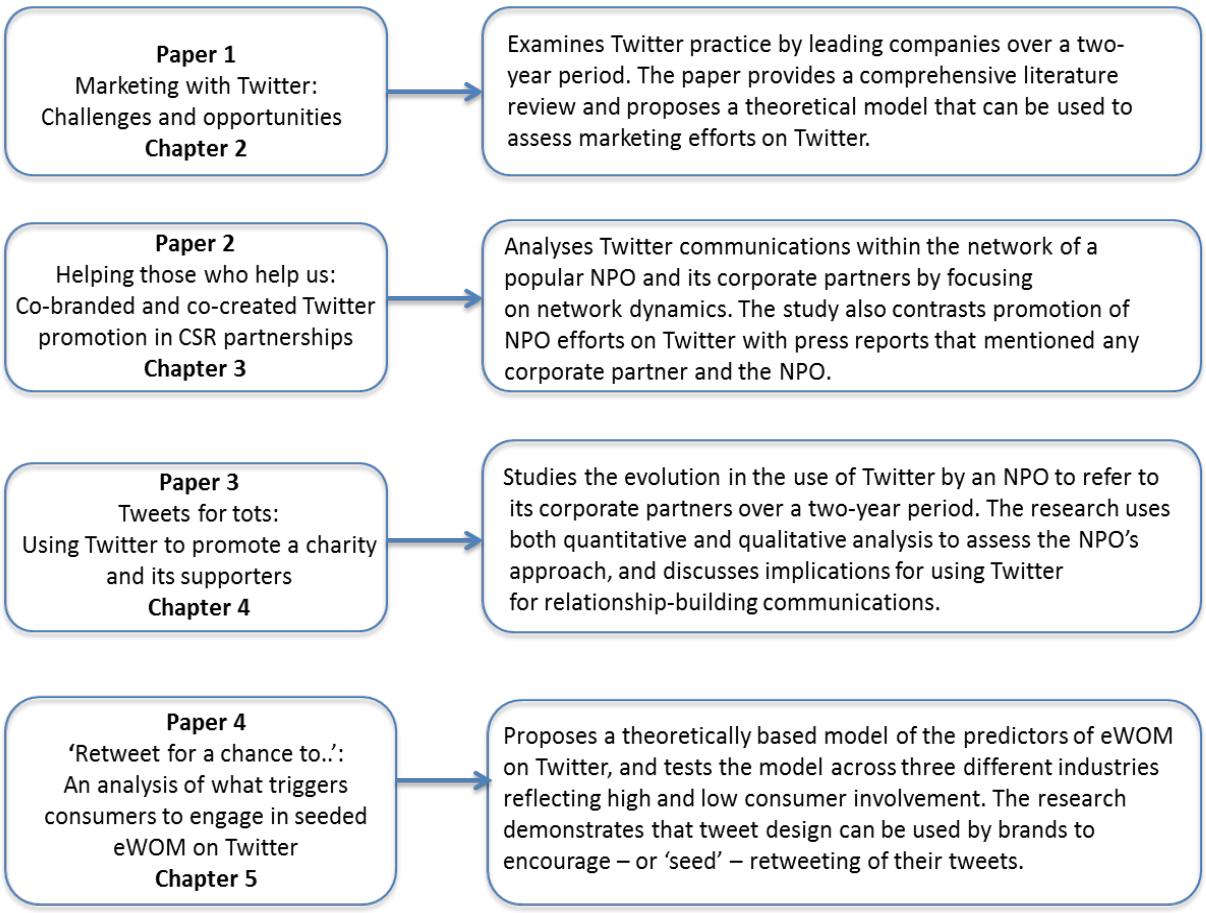
Finally, the research offers advice on the theoretical and practical implications of using Twitter for marketing communications where organisations have only limited control over consumers' social media activities. Chapters 2 to 5 provide extensive discussion covering theoretical and managerial implications of the findings of each study, from insights in regard to the evolving use of Twitter to evaluation of successful and less successful Twitter strategies. Integrating the results from the research should help other organisations to

formulate better engagement strategies, create eWOM seeding campaigns and drive interest in further research on Twitter.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is structured around four separate but related research studies. This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis, and Figure 1 below summarises the content of the four associated publications contained in the following four chapters, which comprise the majority of the thesis.

Figure 1-1: Summary of research papers



Chapter 2[2] contains a book chapter titled: 'Marketing with Twitter: Challenges and Opportunities', that was published in 2015 (Soboleva, Burton, & Khan, 2015). In that research, tweet data for global brands from three industries featured on Interbrand's Best Global Brands list (Interbrand, 2013) was collected for a two-year period, coded using Excel functions and operationalised to obtain four groups of tweet features that were used to evaluate Twitter success: account activity, follower engagement, account engagement with the network and tweet structure. Statistical tests were applied to compare results across different industry groups. The study contributes to the literature by developing and testing a theoretical model of retweeting and by examining changes in organisational Twitter use over time.

Chapter 3[3] contains a journal article that has been published in the Journal of Brand Management (Burton et al., 2017). In that study, archival tweet data from a large US-based charitable organisation (Toys for Tots or T4T) and its corporate partners was collected to identify references to T4T and other partners. In addition, U.S.-based press reports mentioning any partner and T4T over the same time period were identified using the Factiva and ProQuest databases. The results were assessed using statistical analysis and also through social network analysis, to provide a visual representation of the network of reciprocal mentions on Twitter across T4T and its partners. The paper assesses reciprocity within the Twitter network of a non-profit organisation and its partners, and between partners in the network, providing insight into 'coopetition' between organisations that may compete and collaborate at the same time.

[2] Soboleva, A., Burton, S., & Khan, A. (2015). Marketing with Twitter: Challenges and opportunities. In J. Burkhalter & N. Wood (Eds.), *Maximizing Commerce and Marketing Strategies through Micro-Blogging* (Chapter 1, pp. 1-39). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

[3] Burton, S., Soboleva, A., Daellenbach, K., Basil, D. Z., Beckman, T., & Deshpande, S. (2017). Helping those who help us: Co-branded and co-created Twitter promotion in CSR partnerships. *Journal of Brand Management, 24*(4), 322-333.

The third study, featured in Chapter 4[4], has been published by the Journal of Consumer Marketing (Soboleva, Burton, Daellenbach, & Basil, 2017). This research examined the Twitter communications of the same non-profit organisation examined in Chapter 3, but collected tweets for an additional year, and extended the analysis of these tweets. The analysis extends the study contained in Chapter 3 by obtaining comparable tweet data posted by the NPO (T4T) in the same period of the subsequent year. The study assessed the evolution of T4T's proactive and reactive mentioning of its partners through the use of Twitter mentions and retweets using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The research discusses Twitter strategies that NPOs could use to add value for their partners, and contributes to the literature by highlighting the need for T4T and other similar NPOs to use Twitter to acknowledge and reinforce the support of their partners.

The fourth paper, contained in Chapter 5[5], is in press at the Journal of Marketing Management (Soboleva, Burton, Malik, & Khan, in press). In that study, tweet data for 32 global brands from three industries featured on Interbrand's Best Global Brands list (Interbrand, 2013) was collected, coded and analysed using multivariate regression based on a theoretical model assessing the impact of different tweet features on the frequency of retweeting of brand tweets. The paper contributes to the literature by developing a theoretical model of the predictors of eWOM on Twitter, and by testing the model across three different industries reflecting high and low consumer involvement. The analysis reveals that interactive, textual and visual features of tweets are associated with different average retweet counts.

[4] Soboleva, A., Burton, S., Daellenbach, K., & Basil, D., Z. (2017). Tweets for tots: Using Twitter to promote a charity and its supporters. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 34(6), 515-523.

[5] Soboleva, A., Burton, S., Mallik, G., & Khan, A. (2017). 'Retweet for a Chance to…': An analysis of what triggers consumers to engage in seeded eWOM on Twitter. *Journal of Marketing Management, 33*(13-14), 1120-1148.

The analysis includes non-linear terms, in order to estimate the effect of repeated use of a tweet feature (e.g., photos and hashtags) in the same tweet. The results show that tweets need to be carefully crafted by brands to maximise the effect of their Twitter communications and encourage retweeting of their messages.

The conclusion to the thesis is detailed in the last chapter, Chapter 6, which provides a summary of the results, the overarching contribution of the research, and discusses limitations of the research and areas for further research.

1.5 Proposed contributions of the research

The thesis explores what organisations are doing on Twitter, how usage is evolving, what works and what does not work on the platform and what it is possible to achieve on Twitter with regards to effective organisational communications. Specifically, the research contributes to theory in three key ways. Firstly, as part of the publication in Chapter 2, the thesis provides an in-depth literature review, discussing how different factors contribute to the success of organisational communications on Twitter. The chapter draws on marketing, communication, advertising effectiveness and interactivity theory literature to present a framework for classifying and assessing different tweet features and organisational factors.

The framework presented in Chapter 2 is further developed in the research presented in Chapter 5 into a theoretical model of the predictors of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on Twitter. The model examines how different tweet features (e.g., interactive, textual, visual and content related) influence propagation of a tweet within the network, after allowing for the effect of other variables. In addition, the model allows for consumer involvement (as represented by tweets from different industries) and assesses how consumer involvement can impact on engagement with brand communications and subsequent eWOM on Twitter. The

model contributes to building further knowledge in a number of areas: explaining the impact of consumer involvement and interactivity on consumer engagement (as measured by the frequency of retweeting) and by showing how different types of message content can help create persuasive communications.

In addition, the research contributes to theory by studying how Twitter can be used for reciprocal promotion purposes, bringing new insights to the novel research area of coopetition theory. Specifically, the research presented in Chapter 3 adds to the literature on coopetition by showing how co-branded and co-created tweets and retweets can be used to achieve coopetition.

The thesis also contributes to practice by comparing and contrasting differences in Twitter use between the best brands from three different industries as shown by the study in Chapter 2. Another important aspect of the research is its review of how organisational use of Twitter has evolved, providing insights into the evolution of marketing activity on Twitter. The evolution of Twitter use is explored in the studies contained in Chapters 2 and 5. In addition, the research also examines how a non-profit organisation leverages its relationships with supporters, as reflected in the research presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

Beyond looking at current organisational practices on Twitter, the thesis also provides evidence on what works on Twitter and, in particular, how effective communications vary across industry types. The regression model presented in Chapter 5 can be adapted and varied by other organisations to assess the effectiveness of their communications in regards to message propagation on Twitter. The research offers an approach to estimate minimum and maximum threshold levels for tweet features that can be used repeatedly in tweets (e.g., hashtags and photos) and, thus, have a non-linear effect on retweeting. This analysis has not previously been done and should help marketing

practitioners to more accurately assess the success of their marketing efforts on Twitter, and improve their practice by optimising tweet design.

Finally, the thesis will discuss successful (and less successful) Twitter strategies used by the leading global brands, as well as provide recommendations for strategies to increase retweeting of brands' messages, and suggest strategies that NPOs can use to provide mutual benefits for their financial supporters through relationship-building communications.

1.6 Summary of Chapter 1

In conclusion, this chapter has established the background to the research undertaken in this thesis, summarised research gaps in the area and outlined the objectives of the thesis. The chapter has also detailed the structure of the thesis, based around four separate but related research studies. The chapter has also outlined the proposed contributions of the research. The next chapter contains the book chapter that is the first of the four research studies in the thesis.

2: MARKETING WITH TWITTER: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1 Overview of Book Chapter

This chapter presents a study describing Twitter activity by global brands from three industries on Interbrand's Best Global Brands list (Interbrand, 2013). The research proposes a theoretical model that can be used by marketers to maximise their marketing efforts on Twitter and by researchers to assess the impact of Twitter. In order to assess brands' activity, their tweets were downloaded using the Twitonomy analytics tool and using Excel functions, and a count of different tweet features used in the tweets was obtained. This information was analysed and compared over a two-year period. Statistical tests were applied to compare results across different industry groups.

The findings provide several interesting insights. All brands experienced an increase in the number of followers over a one-year interval, but the popularity of some brands studied shows that even very low Twitter activity can be successful in accumulating a large Twitter following, and even infrequent tweeting may still attract a high number of followers. In terms of consumer engagement, tweets that were not replies were more likely to be retweeted, along with tweets that contained a 'retweet' call-to-action, hashtags and/or weblinks. In addition, while there were large differences in performance and tweet composition within industries, there were larger differences between industries.

As the first author, I proposed the idea for the analysis, downloaded and manipulated the data, and performed statistical analysis with assistance from my principal supervisor, who is the second author of this study. I also identified the key literature and wrote the first draft of the chapter, and then received guidance from my supervisor on

improving the structure, synthesising the literature and the writing style, before finalising the submission of the chapter.

The study is important because it provides a comprehensive literature review on Twitter usage, but also because it examines the evolving use of Twitter through analysis of tweet data across a two-year period. The main contribution of the study is its evaluation of factors that predict consumer engagement with organisational tweets, and consideration of different Twitter strategies used by leading global brands. By achieving this, the study addresses the first objective of the thesis to identify factors associated with increasing consumer engagement, including through the frequency of retweeting. This helps clarify the potential of Twitter for brand building and seeding word-of-mouth. In addition, the study provides a discussion of successful (and less successful) Twitter strategies used by the leading global brands examined. This discussion addresses another objective of the thesis, i.e. to offer advice on the implications of using Twitter for marketing purposes.

The study was originally published as a book chapter[6]. For consistency of presentation, it and the other studies presented in the thesis have been reformatted to a uniform thesis style. In addition, while in the original paper references were listed at the end of the chapter, in order to provide one comprehensive reference list, references for the entire thesis have been combined in one reference list at the end of the thesis.

[6] Soboleva, A., Burton, S., & Khan, A. (2015). Marketing with Twitter: Challenges and opportunities. In J. Burkhalter & N. Wood (Eds.), *Maximizing Commerce and Marketing Strategies through Micro-Blogging* (Chapter 1, pp. 1-39). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Marketing with Twitter: Challenges and Opportunities

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 researchers and academics 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 discuss the implications for marketing with Twitter, for these and for smaller organizations.

Keywords

Luxury, FMCG, Auto, retweet, measures, followers, strategy, Duracell, Louis Vuitton, Pampers, BMW, VW (Volkswagen)

2.2 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, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 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, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). By the end of 2013, more than 80% of Fortune 500 companies had Twitter accounts, 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, which can be used to assess the effectiveness of a Twitter strategy, and using Twitter data from leading global brands from two consecutive years, we discuss tweet features, which 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.

2.2.1 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, Miller, & White, 2013). Increasingly, however, Twitter is being used for both marketing (e.g., Burton et al., 2013; Yadav, de Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013), and as an advertising channel (e.g., Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014; Lambrecht, Tucker, & Wiertz, 2014).

2.2.1.1 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 has the potential to reach a multitude of audiences because its technological features assist in the discovery of content posted. A user does not have to log in to read the tweets of a public account, so 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, 2011b). 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, Wood, & Tryce, 2014). As

we discuss later, other Twitter conventions also facilitate propagation of Twitter messages, such as the practice of retweeting, which can introduce content to new audiences (boyd et al., 2010) and inclusion of hashtags, which facilitates 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, Rui, & Whinston, 2014) – and for newspapers, has been found to be more effective than Facebook for distributing content (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2013).

2.2.1.2 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, Brown, & Milne, 2014). A Twitter presence generates exposure, can drive traffic to a brand's website, and allows a brand to connect with its customers directly (Kwon & Sung, 2011). With 24/7 connectivity, Twitter also provides a critical digital channel for executing promotions, stimulating sales and driving market share (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010). A number of industry reports suggest that customer relationship management systems that integrated Twitter data from customers and prospects help to increase the percentage of sales leads that result in actual sales, relative to traditional CRM approaches (Heggestuen, 2013). Interacting on Twitter is especially relevant for companies who target younger adults in the 'millennial generation', who expect a two-way, mutual relationship with companies and require a brand to be present across a full range of media (Barton, Koslow, & Beauchamp, 2014).

Twitter's potential for rapid response and pass-along mean that brand tweets can potentially reach an audience that is far larger than the brand's followers. But brands need to convey authentic personalities through their Twitter presence in order to be noticed and liked by young adults (Sashittal, Hodis, & Sriramachandramurthy, 2014). As a result, creating

content that responds to trending themes is crucial to increase interest and word of mouth (Lieb & Groopman, 2013; Wells, 2014). One example of the power of Twitter was a tweet by Snickers during a 2014 World Cup match, when Luis Suarez, Uruguay's star forward, was believed to have bitten a defender on Italy's team. Snickers' US Twitter handle tweeted "*Hey @luis16suarez. Next time you're hungry just grab a Snickers. #worldcup #luissuarez #EatASNICKERS*", with an embedded image of a Snickers, the caption "More Satisfying than Italian", and featuring the widely followed hashtag '#LuisSuarez'. The tweet was retweeted nearly 50,000 times and favorited more than 20,000 times, demonstrating how a brand can use topical content to reach a very large audience on Twitter.

2.2.1.3 Engagement with Consumers and Word of Mouth

As more and more people become engaged with Twitter, in part triggered by popular events such as the World Cup (Goel, 2014), the medium becomes more valuable as an avenue for brands to engage with customers. Twitter can facilitate consumer engagement with a brand in different ways: for example by including weblinks and hashtags to increase retweeting (Suh et al., 2010); by monitoring and responding to consumer comments online (Canhoto & Clark, 2013); by using popular hashtags such as #FF (Follow Friday) to promote organizational products or outlets (Page, 2012), or by including celebrities in brands' conversations to draw attention to unfamiliar brands (Wood & Burkhalter, 2013).

Twitter has become a platform that promotes brand conversations (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2012) and as a result, facilitates consumers' willingness to engage in word of mouth (e.g. Jansen et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2014). Although some word of mouth will be outside the control of brands, regular tweeting of appropriate content can boost word of mouth (Zhang et al., 2011). Twitter can also be used to respond to negative word of mouth

either directly to a customer (e.g. Page, 2014), or to counter sudden outbreaks of outrage by activating existing fan networks (Pfeffer, Zorbach, & Carley, 2013).

2.2.1.4 Monitoring and Responsiveness

Listening in on social media can provide an indication of sentiment towards a brand (Schweidel & Moe, 2014), and as discussed above, provide a mechanism for responding to either individual negative word of mouth or sudden outbreaks of negative sentiment. Organizations that monitor their online reputation are more responsive (Li & Solis, 2013). Monitoring can be used to track and respond to mentions of the brand's Twitter handle (Canhoto & Clark, 2013), and during a crisis, Twitter can be used to spread information and engage in discussion with stakeholders. For example, when a volcanic explosion in Iceland caused havoc for airlines worldwide in 2010, Air France-KLM used Twitter to communicate with 'huge waves' of customers (Kane, 2014).

2.2.2 Challenges of Using Twitter for Marketing

Twitter also presents challenges for marketers, as we discuss in the following section. One recent industry research has even questioned the use of Twitter as a marketing channel, pointing to evidence of the low impact of social media on consumer purchase decisions (Swift, 2014). Below, we summarize three key challenges in marketing with Twitter.

2.2.2.1 Rapid Evolution of Technologies

Part of the challenge in marketing with Twitter is that the platform frequently goes through technological change, most recently introducing new features such as 'big tweets' (highly retweeted or favorite tweets which appear in a larger font than those around them), and pinned tweets (tweets that a user has chosen to pin to their profile page) that change the

dynamics of interaction between brands and its followers (Washeck, 2014). These relatively small differences in the way Twitter can be used may have big impact on individual and organizational behavior on the platform. Consequently, such newly discovered capabilities can make previously established findings redundant and require marketing practitioners and researchers to develop new theories of Twitter effectiveness.

2.2.2.2 Potential for Negative WOM

One of the obvious challenges for using any social media for marketing is that social media have the potential to make even strong brands vulnerable due to consumer empowerment (Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienari, 2013). As discussed above, Twitter can be a valuable medium for positive word of mouth propagation, but it also potentially exposes brands to a considerable volume of negative commentary and complaints from consumers (Pfeffer et al., 2013). While positive WOM can obviously assist brands, one study found that negative effect of WOM had a much greater effect on consumers' choices than positive WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2014). There is also a risk that negative WOM may spread further and faster: two studies have found that found that negative sentiment can increase propagation of tweets (Hansen, Arvidsson, Nielsen, Colleoni, & Etter, 2011; Naveed et al., 2011).

2.2.2.3 Uncertain Return on Investment

Establishing the ROI of social media marketing is a well-established problem with social media (e.g. Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). In one survey, 96.2% of brands reported challenges in using Twitter to achieve specific goals – in particular, in measuring the ROI and results of using Twitter as a marketing tool (Howen, 2014). 48% of social media marketers have been reported to be planning to create metrics that demonstrate the value of social media

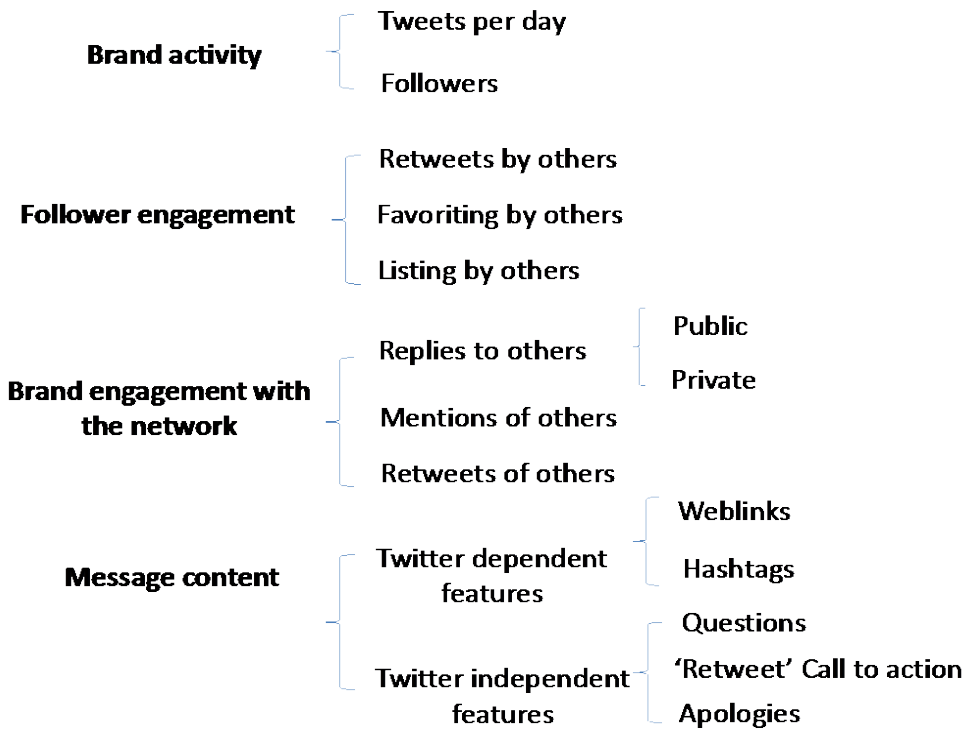
(Solis & Li, 2013). However such a goal will be difficult given the lack of standardized metrics across different social network (Kelly, 2014). Measures such as replies, retweets, mentions and favorites can be used to estimate customer engagement (Furubayashi, 2014). But tweets can be effective due to a combination of factors such as an attractive call to action, embedded rich media or number of hashtags in the tweet or time of the day the tweet is posted (Salesforce, 2013) .

Despite the difficulties in establishing the ROI of Twitter use, there is some evidence that customers who use Twitter are likely to engage with a brand: Twitter says that its research reveals that 54% of consumers who use Twitter during primetime TV hours take action (such as visiting a brand's website) after seeing a brand mention in a tweet (Midha, 2014). Increasingly, however, brands are said to be moving away from the idea that they can track the ROI of social media, and are instead evaluating their social media strategies in terms of audience building, brand awareness and customer relations. In the next section we therefore review potential measures of the success of Twitter communication, and tweet features which can be varied to increase customer engagement.

2.2.3 Measures of activity, success and tweet content

Various measures of Twitter activity and success have been proposed in the literature (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013; Burton et al., 2013; Neiger, Thackeray, Burton, Giraud-Carrier, & Fagen, 2013; Sterne, 2010). In the following section, we classify Twitter measures into four categories, as shown in Figure 1: 1) account **Activity**, 2) **Follower engagement**, 3) **Account engagement** with the network, and 4) features of the **Message content**.

Figure 2.1: Measures of Twitter success and activity



2.2.3.1 Brand Activity

The two most basic measures of Twitter activity are the number of tweets posted and number of followers, since together they provide an (imperfect) indicator of the time invested in Twitter activity, and of effectiveness in reaching followers.

2.2.3.1.1 Tweets per Day

The number of tweets sent provides a proxy - if crude - for the organizational time allocated to Twitter (Burton et al., 2013). Analysis of the number of tweets sent per day and follower numbers can also help to determine if there is an optimal number of tweets that should be sent per day (Zarella, 2013).

2.2.3.1.2 Number of Followers

The most basic and obvious measure of a Twitter handle's success is the number of followers, because it shows the size of the audience to whom tweets will be distributed. The

number of followers is thus an indicator of a Twitter handle's potential influence (Kwak et al., 2010), but too often, marketers focus only on this metric (Furubayashi, 2014). Having more followers does not automatically translate into greater social influence (Cha et al., 2010). Followers can be inactive and never view tweets, so a Twitter handle may be more effective with fewer, more engaged followers who retweet its tweets. The number of followers can also be inflated by robot' (or fake) followers purchased to inflate a brand's follower count (Stringhini et al., 2013), thus highlighting the importance of measures of follower engagement, rather than just follower numbers.

2.2.3.2 Follower Engagement

Given the problems of using follower numbers as a measure of Twitter success, a critical measure of Twitter effectiveness is the extent to which a brand engages its Twitter followers. To be influential, a Twitter handle needs to do more than have followers: it also needs to overcome user passivity, so that users engage with its tweets (Romero et al., 2011). User engagement can therefore be assessed in three ways; by the frequency of retweeting, tweet favoriting and listing.

2.2.3.2.1 Retweets by Others

The most important measure of engagement with a tweet is retweeting, since retweeting shows that a follower has read a tweet and implies a personal endorsement of the tweet (except in the relatively rare circumstances where a follower retweets a message with negative commentary). Retweeting demonstrates user engagement with a brand, and is correlated with brand identification, brand trust, community commitment, and community membership intention (Kim et al., 2014). Retweeting is also important because it represents electronic word of mouth to the networks of the brand's followers (Zhang et al., 2011), and thus increases the potential reach of a brand's tweet to followers' networks. Although there

are some recent reports that robot Twitter handles can be programed to retweet (Ferrara, Varol, Davis, Menczer, & Flammini, 2016), at least until robot handles are routinely programmed to retweet, retweeting is likely to largely reflect actual follower activity, so is therefore a better measure of Twitter success than follower numbers, which may be inflated by inactive users or robot followers.

2.2.3.2.2 Favoriting by Others

As well as, or instead of retweeting, followers (or others who see a tweet) can show engagement by favoriting a tweet, by clicking a star icon underneath the tweet. The reasons for favoriting are diverse, but favoriting generally reflects content endorsement or demonstration of positive sentiment towards the tweet content or sender (Meier et al., 2014). Favoriting thus represents user engagement with the tweet, but is also different from retweeting, because favoriting, unlike retweeting, does not extend the reach of the tweet to the user's own network.

2.2.3.2.3 Listing by Others

Lists are curated groups of Twitter handles, which can be created and subscribed to (Twitter, 2012). The number of times a Twitter handle is listed can be interpreted as an indication of its authority (e.g. Duan, Jiang, Qin, Zhou, & Shum, 2010), as a way of measuring influence (Pullen, 2009), and a form of recommendation (e.g. Krutkam et al., 2010). The frequency that a brand handle is listed is therefore an additional measure of user engagement with the brand.

2.2.3.3 Brand Engagement with the Network

A brand's Twitter handle can also show its own engagement with its followers in several ways: by replying, by mentioning and by retweeting others.

2.2.3.3.1 Replying to Others

Replies to other Twitter users (signified by a tweet which begins with '@' or '.@') reflect a direct conversation between a brand and one or more followers. Replies have been said to be important in building rapport with followers through mutual engagement (Furubayashi, 2014). A default reply (indicated by a tweet starting with '@'), does not go to the sender's entire following. These tweets are visible to the recipient, to anyone who follows both sender and receiver, and are also visible on the sender's Twitter profile page. We call these replies 'private' to reflect that they are largely private, though a more accurate term might be 'less public', reflecting that 'private' replies are not confined to sender and recipient. Replies can also be 'public' (signified by a tweet beginning with '.@'), and these are visible to all followers of the sender. Both public and 'private' replies thus provide a measure of a brand's engagement with its network, either with one user (through @ replies) or with many (through .@ replies).

2.2.3.3.2 Mentions of Others

A Twitter user can refer to another user by including their Twitter handle in the message – a 'mention'. As with retweets and replies and, this metric allows assessment of the extent of a user's public interactions, in contrast with a potentially passive follower network (Yang & Counts, 2010).

2.2.3.3.3 Retweets of Others

Users can also engage with the Twitter network by retweeting others' tweets. As the name suggests, this metric also measures the extent of user interaction with its network, as well as a way to find out which tweets are seen as worthy of passing along (e.g. Ehrlich & Shami, 2010).

2.2.3.4 Message Content

Tweet content can also be assessed for inclusion of features designed to increase user engagement. These features have been divided into and Twitter independent and Twitter dependent features (Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011). Twitter-dependent features include weblinks or hashtags, and Twitter independent features relate to the presence of punctuation features (e.g. question and exclamation marks) and linguistic features signalling emotions and/or content. A very large number of tweet features can and have been coded (Castillo et al., 2011; Misopoulos et al., 2014; Naveed et al., 2011) but those studies have not focused on brand tweets. In this analysis, we focus on two Twitter-dependent and three Twitter-independent features: weblinks and hashtags because they have been shown to increase retweeting, questions, inclusion of a call to action ('Retweet') and apologies, because they are likely to be particularly important for brands attempting to create a user response (for questions and a call to action) and for responding to customer problems (with apologies).

2.2.3.4.1 Use of Weblinks

Tweets with weblinks have been found to be more likely to be retweeted (Suh et al., 2010), but what a user can do with weblinks has been rapidly evolving. Previously, clicking on a weblink meant that a user would be directed to a website (and thus leave Twitter). Although some weblinks in tweets still take users to an external website, Twitter now offers weblinks to embedded photos and/or videos, where instead of the user having to leave Twitter, the tweet itself expands to show the content (Cooper, 2013). One study of the impact of different tweet features found that photos increase the retweet rate by 35%, and videos by 28% (Rogers, 2014), though that study did not specifically analyze organizational tweets, nor differentiate between links with embedded content or those which direct the user to an external site.

2.2.3.4.2 Use of Hashtags

Like weblinks, inclusion of a hashtag in a tweet has been found to increase the retweet rate (Suh et al., 2010), with one recent estimate that inclusion of a hashtag increases the retweet rate by 16% (Rogers, 2014). Hashtags also increase the discoverability of the tweet outside the user's followers, because people who are not followers, but who search for the hashtag, can see tweets containing that hashtag.

2.2.3.4.3 Questions

Tweets can also be coded for the presence of linguistic features which might increase retweeting. The use of questions in tweets is particularly interesting, because by their nature, questions are intended to elicit a response (Naveed et al., 2011). However there is conflicting research on the effect of questions in tweets: one study found that the use of questions increased retweeting (Naveed et al., 2011), while another found that tweets with question marks were associated with lower credibility (which, in turn, would be expected to be associated with lower retweeting (Castillo et al., 2011). Neither study, however, examined the effect of questions in brand tweets.

2.2.3.4.4 Retweet Call to Action

A retweet request has been identified as one of the factors which can lead users to retweet (boyd et al., 2010). There are varying reports of the effectiveness of direct appeals for retweeting, with different studies reporting increases ranging from 34% (Malhotra et al., 2012) to 1,200% (Salesforce, 2013). However, the effect of a direct call to action in the form of a request to retweet is likely to be lower for commercial tweets, and may also decrease as more Twitter users adopt the practice in an attempt to be retweeted. We therefore examined the effect of a 'Retweet' call to action for these leading brands.

2.2.3.4.5 Apologies

Twitter can also be used as a channel to identify and respond to customer problems. Problems can be identified by both direct complaint tweets to the brand, and also by monitoring brand mentions on Twitter. However, responding to complaints using Twitter has the potential for exposing customer problems to a wider audience and (if apologies are not confined to private replies) creating a Twitter feed which is uninteresting to other followers. There has been some analysis of apologies (Burton & Soboleva, 2011; Page, 2014), but neither of those studies differentiated between public and 'private' replies, so the extent to which companies apologize publicly (if at all) is not clear.

So, in summary, Twitter has both benefits and challenges when used as a marketing tool: it can allow brands to reach larger groups of consumers, and spread brand messages beyond the brand's direct followers through Twitter features such as retweeting and mentions. However, there are also challenges in associating Twitter activities with desired financial outcomes, a risk that Twitter can expose the brand to negative word of mouth, and a constant challenge in revising the Twitter strategy in response to its evolving capabilities. In the following sections we analyze the Twitter practices of leading global brands using the measures outlined above, and draw out implications for them and for other businesses.

2.2.4 Can We Learn from What the Leading Brands are Doing?

Given the challenges of marketing with Twitter, we analyzed the Twitter practices of 33 leading global business to consumer (B2C) brands. These brands are likely to have some of the largest social media marketing budgets, so should provide exemplars of marketing practice. In the following section, we detail the brands and how the data was collected and analyzed.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Sample

The industries and companies were initially identified from Interbrand's Best Global Brands report (Interbrand, 2012), and then updated using the revised list one year later (Interbrand, 2013). Interbrand is a brand consultancy firm that publishes an annual list of the 100 most valued brands, using a broadly accepted brand valuation method (Haigh & Perrier, 1997). Interbrand's 2012 list contained entries for 18 industry categories, with the number of brands in each category ranging from 13 (for the Auto category) to 1 (for Transportation, Home furnishings and Energy). Since the aim of the study was to examine Twitter activity by leading B2C brands, two industry categories with a large B2B presence were excluded (Financial services and Technology), leaving a sample of three of the largest Interbrand industries (Automotive, FMCG/CPG and Luxury).

All brands within the three selected industries on the Interbrand list had Twitter handles except for one luxury brand (Hermes), resulting in a 2013 sample of 13 Auto brands, 11 FMCG brands and 6 luxury brands. Many companies have more than one Twitter handle, so the central organizational handle (and in the absence of an obvious central handle, the one with the largest number of followers) was chosen for analysis. Two additional brands (Chevrolet and Duracell) were included on the 2013 Interbrand list, so were added to the 2014 analysis, and one brand was excluded in each study period due to very low or no Twitter activity (Cartier in 2013 and Heinz in 2014). Despite the relatively small number of brands within each industry category, the analysis therefore includes a Twitter handle from the entire population of active Twitter users among top-ranked brands in the three industries being analyzed.

A list of the Twitter handles for the brands, their Twitter followers and their most commonly used hashtags is shown in Table 1. As of September 2014, all brands except Colgate and Danone, had 'verified' Twitter handles. (A handle can be 'verified' by Twitter to show that it represents the real brand (or person) and not an imposter. Verification is indicated on the brand's Twitter page by a blue checkmark icon next to the handle name.)

Table 2-1: Brands examined, number of followers and most frequently used hashtags

Twitter handle	Followers ('000s)[1]	3 most used hashtags (where >1)
Auto		
@Audi	884.0	#wantanr8 (68), #a3 (45), #quattro (38)
@BMWUSA	187.0	#bmw (227), #bmwbobsled (58), #bmwi8 (22)
@chevrolet[2]	503.0	#chevysxsw (798), #thenew (256), #purpleyourprofile (162)
@FerrariUSA	48.1	#ferrari (58), #ff (12), #tbt (11)
@Ford	527.0	#fordearnings (79), #fordmustang (50), #fordnaias (39)
@harleydavidson	224.0	#photooftheday (171), #potd (171), #daytonbikeweek (43)
@Honda	397.0	#hondalove (1996), #lovetoday (104), #bestyourself (53)
@Hyundai	166.0	#nextgenesis (112), #laautoshow (40), #hyundailaas (32)
@Kia	176.0	#kiak900 (171), #kiasoul (87), #kiakey (78)
@MercedesBenz	641.0	#amg (194), #mercedesbenz (192), #cclass (61)
@NissanUS	402.0	#nissannyias (51), #nissan (47), #namethatnissan (46)
@Porsche	657.0	#porsche (19), #porschemacan (11), #naias (7)
@Toyota	351.0	#letsgoplaces (69), #toyotaft1 (54), #noroomforboring (51)
@VW	307.0	#vwcares (273), #vw (122), #dasauto (32)
FMCG		
@AvonInsider	83.4	#fabin5 (89), #beauty (62), #nyfw (55)
@Colgate	11.1	#nodeforestation (17)
@Duracell[2]	70.5	#powerasmile (29), #dwts (19), #trustyourpower (16)
@DanoneGroup	5.6	#danone (53), #agm14 (31), #fy2013(26)
@Gillette	59.6	#gillette4life (124), #sochi2014 (32), #byahair (30)
@HJHeinzCompany[3]	6.0	#earnings (17), #heinz (8), #dividend (3)
@JNJNews	74.2	#jnj (268), #jnjasm14 (41), #ntds (27)
@KelloggCompany	10.3	#startwithcereal (52), #cereal (10), #walmartexpo (7)
@Kleenex	16.2	#kleenex (288), #cooltouch (104), #kleenexstyle (41)
@Loreal	49.7	#finance (98), #lorealafrica (31), #hacklorealdpp (29)
@Nestle	56.5	#nestle (137), #employment4youth (83), #wef2014 (48)
@Pampers	114.0	#pampersgameface (115), #pampersrewards (41), #pamperslove (34)
Luxury		
@Burberry	3,180.0	#burberry (218), #lfw (132), #lcm (78)
@LouisVuitton	3,810.0	#louisvuitton (166), #lvpass (27), #lvlive (25)
@Cartier[4]	102.0	#cartier (46), #sihh (10), #cartierexhibition (7)
@Prada	143.0	#backstage (14), #castellocavalcanti (11), #ss14 (8)
@gucci	1,200.0	#gucci (99), #mfw (23), #guccifringe (23)
@RalphLauren	893.0	#teamusa (75), #ralphlauren (35), #meetteamusa (28)
@TiffanyAndCo	1,040.0	#tiffanyweddings (54), #tiffanybluebook (40), #tiffanyvalentine (26)

[1] Followers as of September 2014 [2] New to Interbrand list in 2013
[3] Excluded in 2014 due to low activity [4] Excluded in 2013 due to low activity

2.3.2 Data Collection

All tweets by the chosen Twitter handles for the period from November 2012 to 30 April 2013 were downloaded in csv format using Twitonomy's premium subscription service. One year later, comparable data for the updated Interbrand list of brands was obtained, providing a comparable sample to assess change in activity over a year. Additional information on each Twitter handle was obtained from Twitonomy's analytics reports. Some analysis of the 2013 sample has been published elsewhere (Soboleva, Burton, & Khan, 2013) so in this chapter, we focus primarily on the 2014 sample and on changes in activity from 2013 to 2014.

2.3.3 Measurement

Details of how measures were calculated are given below.

2.3.3.1 Brand Activity:

Tweets per day: The number of tweets posted by each Twitter handle per day was calculated by taking the total tweets posted over the six-month study period and dividing by 181 (i.e. the days in the six-month period).

Number of followers: The number of followers for each Twitter handle was obtained from Twitonomy analytics reports downloaded within a week of the end of each data analysis period, thus reflecting the number of followers at the end of each six-month study period. Table 1 gives updated follower numbers, as of September 2014.

2.3.3.2 Follower Engagement:

Retweets and favorites by others: The number of retweets and favorites for each tweet was obtained from the downloaded csv files, allowing comparison of retweets and favorites per tweet.

Times listed: The number of times each brand Twitter handle was listed by others was obtained from the Twitonomy analytics reports. Since listing is for the Twitter handle, listing is per brand, not per tweet.

2.3.3.3 Brand Engagement:

Replies to others: Tweets with replies were identified from the csv files using an Excel search function. Replies were separately coded into public (.@) and 'private' (@) replies.

Mentions of others: Mentions were also identified using an Excel search for tweets containing '[space]@' outside the first two characters of the tweet (where @ signifies a public or private reply). (The space before the '2' sign is necessary to separate mentions from email addresses.)

Retweets of others: The proportion of tweets by each brand that are retweets of others' tweets was obtained from Twitonomy analytics reports.

2.3.3.4 Message Content:

Twitter dependent features: Weblinks and hashtags were identified using Excel search formulas.

Twitter independent features: Questions, 'Retweet' calls to action and apologies were respectively identified using Excel search formulas, searching for '?', 'Retweet',

'sorry', and 'apologize/apologise'. 'Sorry/Apology' tweets were reviewed to ensure that they predominantly reflected a customer response. The review indicated a very small percentage of tweets which were not linked to service recovery (e.g. 'sorry for your loss' and 'sorry to hear that you are sick'). However instead of coding all tweets to separate out this very small percentage which did not relate to service recovery, we report on total use of the terms 'apologi(z)e' and 'sorry' since automatic search allows efficient analysis of large data sets, and provides a very strong (though imperfect) representation of tweets reflecting service recovery. Similarly, the automated search for 'Retweet' identified two tweets (out of 133) containing the word 'retweet' which were other calls-to-action (that is, appeals to 'check out' something). These were retained in the analysis, since they represented calls to action, though using 'check out' other than 'retweet'.

2.3.4 Analysis

Since the samples for each industry represented the population of active Twitter users among the top global brands in the three industries being studied, the use of statistical tests is theoretically unnecessary, since any observed differences between industries are not due to sampling error, and reflect real differences between the industries during the study period. Nevertheless, since an analysis of any one-time period reflects a sample of the activity during all possible time periods, we applied statistical tests, since some readers will be used to seeing them for comparisons between groups, and to provide some assessment of the size of observed variability between groups, relative to the variability within groups.

Some of the statistics (e.g. number of followers) are very skewed, so for small sample sizes (i.e. comparison of summary industry performance) we used non-parametric tests to compare differences in median measures across industries. Where there were outliers in the data, we used Mood's median test (which is more robust than other tests against the

presence of outliers) for comparisons across the industries. Where no outliers were present, we used the Kruskal-Wallis test, which is more powerful than Mood's median test in the absence of outliers. Where the Mood's or Kruskal-Wallis test was significant, we used follow-up Mann-Whitney tests for pairwise comparisons. For comparisons of proportions (hashtags, weblinks and retweets of others) we used the normal approximation (which is appropriate given the sample size). For differences in retweet rate of tweets with and without different message features (as in Table 7) we used T-tests, which are robust against non-normality of the data for the large sample sizes involved. Since the number of statistical tests was moderately large, we report results as 'significant' for p values of ≤ 0.01, report the exact value for p values between 0.01 and 0.05 without commenting on significance, and consider values of ≥ 0.05 as not significant, but report the size of p values between .05 and .1 to give an indication of the size of observed differences.

2.4 Results

The following section presents the results from the analysis under four sections, investigating 1) the activity and audience of the Twitter handles of the selected leading brands, 2) the effectiveness of their Twitter communication, as indicated by their success in engaging their Twitter audience, 3) the brands' engagement with their networks, and 4) message content features.

2.4.1 What are the Leading Brands Doing?

2.4.1.1 Brand Activity

2.4.1.1.1 Tweets per Day

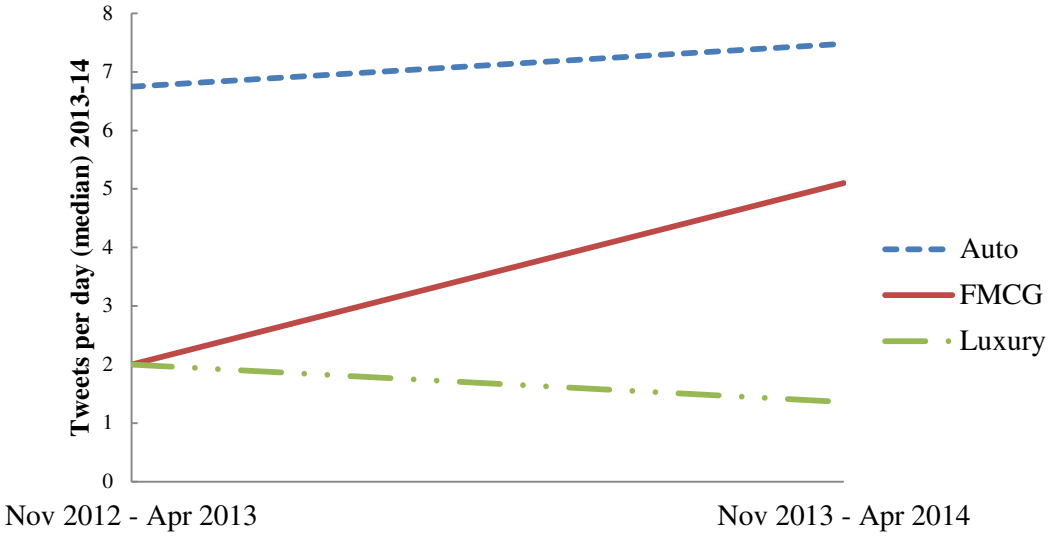
Most leading brands are tweeting less than ten times a day, on average (see Table 2). The Luxury brands tweeted far less than those in other industries, with a median of only 1.36

tweets per day over the six-month period, compared to a median of 7.48 tweets per day in the Auto industry. However, within each industry, there were brands that tweeted less than once a day on average (Ferrari, Porsche, Colgate, Kellogg's, Cartier and Prada). Even the highest tweeting brands (Volkswagen and Honda) were respectively sending only 17.7 and 17.2 tweets per day, so Twitter communications would not seem to require a large amount of corporate time for these Twitter handles. For these brands, sending more tweets (or fewer) doesn't appear to influence the number of followers: there was no association between the number of tweets sent per day and the number of followers ($p > 0.1$). Some brands are even tweeting less: Luxury brands are typically sending fewer tweets than a year earlier (see Figure 2), but over the same period, have experienced a large increase in the number of followers (see Figure 3). These low-tweeting, very popular Luxury brands show that even very low Twitter activity can be successful in accumulating a large following.

Table 2-2: Tweets sent per day 2014

		Tweets per day		
Industry	**N**	**Mean**	**Median**	**SD**
Auto	14	8.93	7.48	5.78
FMCG	11	4.93	5.10	3.99
Luxury	7	2.62	1.36	2.28
All	32	6.17	5.55	5.20
Sig: Overall:			H = 7.59, p = 0.023	
Follow up:			Luxury vs FMCG: p = ns	
			Luxury vs auto: p = 0.01	
			Auto vs FMCG: p = 0.09	

Figure 2-2: Change in tweets per day 2013-14



2.4.1.1.2 Followers

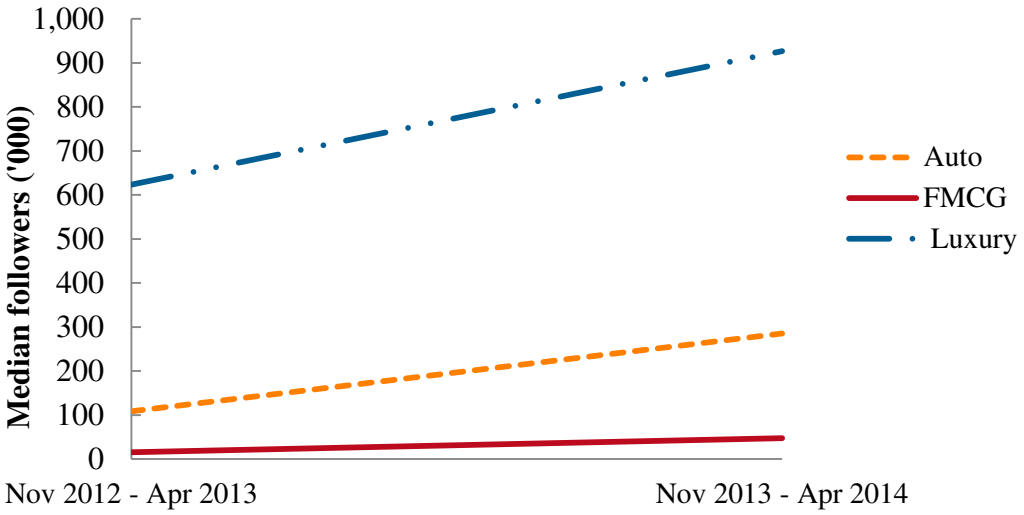
Unsurprisingly, there was considerable variation in the number of followers between industries, with Luxury (p < 0.003) and Auto brands (p < 0.001) having significantly more followers than FMCG brands (see Table 3). Three Luxury brands (Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Gucci) had more than a million followers each. While it is not surprising that Luxury brands would have more followers than FMCG brands, the best performing FMCG brand (Pampers) had more than 100,000 followers – a higher number than Cartier, Prada, or in the

Auto industry, Ferrari. The success of Pampers and other FMCG brands (such as Duracell and Avon, both with over 70,000 followers), shows that even low involvement product brands can obtain a large Twitter audience. All industries had experienced an increase in the number of followers over the year (see Figure 3), with Luxury brands having the largest increase, despite sending fewer tweets than a year earlier (see Figure 2). In contrast, the number of tweets sent had increased most for FMCG brands, but those brands had experienced the smallest increase in number of followers.

Table 2-3: Number of followers 2014

		Number of followers		
Industry	**N**	**Mean**	**Median**	**SD**
Auto	14	311.69	285.30	181.86
FMCG	11	44.74	47.30	33.65
Luxury	7	1,284.82	926.81	1,266.22
All	32	432.80	149.51	740.63
Sig: Overall:		$H = 18.04$, $p < 0.001$		
Follow up:		Luxury vs FMCG: $p = 0.003$		
		Luxury vs Auto: $p = 0.09$		
		Auto vs FMCG: $p < 0.001$		

Figure 2-3: Change in followers 2013-14



2.4.1.2 Follower Engagement:

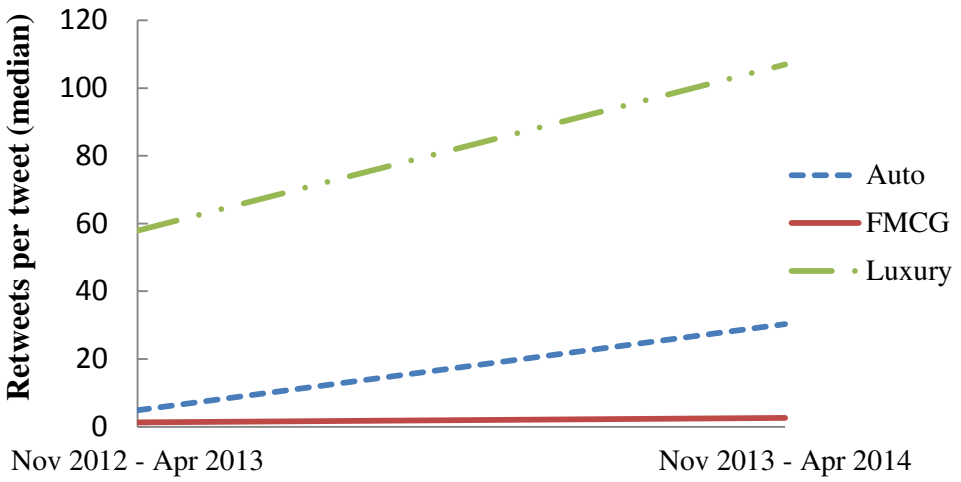
2.4.1.2.1 Retweeting

There were large and significant differences in the extent to which industries' tweets were retweeted (by followers and their followers) (see Table 4). Luxury tweets were retweeted far more often, with a median retweet rate of 107.0 per tweet, compared to Auto (med = 21.6) and FMCG (med = 2.6). However, the best performing FMCG brand, Duracell, had retweet rates more than double that of three of the Auto companies - Hyundai, Honda and Kia. While those low-retweet Auto brands represent Asian car companies (albeit their US Twitter handles), their low retweet rate is not explained by the country of origin of the brand, with other Asian auto brands (Nissan and Toyota) achieving high retweet rates. Compared to a year earlier, retweet rates of Luxury tweets had risen most sharply (from a median of 58 retweets per tweet to 107) (see Figure 4). FMCG retweets had doubled over the year (from a median of 1.3 to 2.6 retweets per tweet) but remained small in absolute terms.

Table 2-4: Retweets per tweet 2014

		Retweets per tweet		
Industry	**N**	**Mean**	**Median**	**SD**
Auto	14	38.51	21.63	36.19
FMCG	11	3.48	2.57	3.46
Luxury	7	139.67	106.99	121.75
All	32	48.60	18.10	77.90
Sig: Overall:			Chis = 19.14, $p < 0.001$	
Follow up:			Luxury vs FMCG: $p < 0.001$	
			Luxury vs Auto: $p = 0.004$	
			Auto vs FMCG: $p < 0.001$	

Figure 2-4: Change in retweets rate 2013-14



2.4.1.2.2 Favoriting

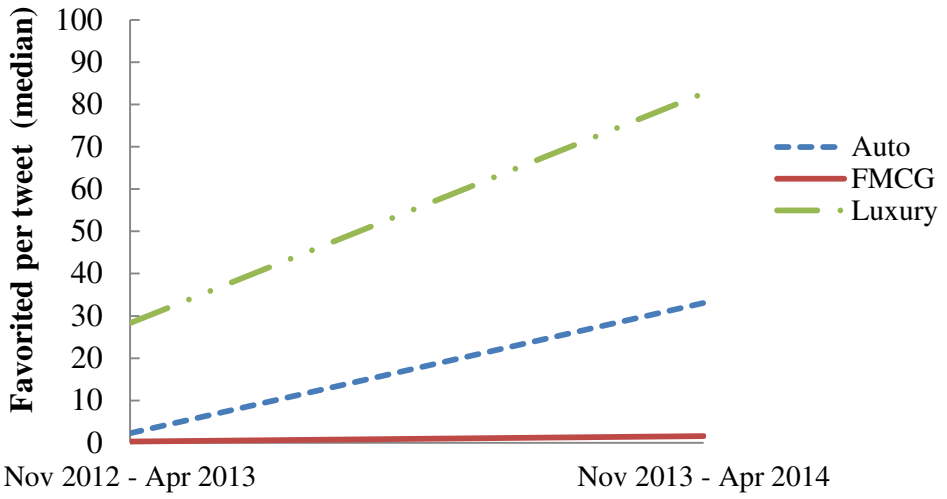
Though tweets were less likely to be favorited than retweeted, frequency of favoriting was highly correlated with retweeting ($r = 0.98$), so unsurprisingly, results for favoriting mirrored those of retweeting, with Luxury tweets favorited significantly more than Auto tweets ($p = 0.005$) and FMCG ($p < 0.001$), and Auto tweets favorited significantly more than FMCG tweets ($p < 0.001$) (see Table 5). As with retweeting, Luxury tweets had experienced the highest increase in favoriting compared to one year earlier (see Figure 5). The FMCG industry, while experiencing the largest relative increase in favoriting (from a

median of 0.3 to 1.6 favorites per tweet) continued to have a much smaller proportion of tweets favorited.

Table 2-5: Favorites per tweet 2013-14

		Favorited per tweet		
Industry	**N**	**Mean**	**Median**	**SD**
Auto	14	41.30	21.60	40.10
FMCG	11	3.80	1.61	5.45
Luxury	7	171.20	82.70	148.30
All	32	56.80	18.20	94.90
Sig: Overall:		Chis = 14.65, p = 0.001		
Follow up:		Luxury vs FMCG: p < 0.001		
		Luxury vs Auto: p = 0.005		
		Auto vs FMCG: p < 0.001		

Figure 2-5: Change in favoriting 2013-14



2.4.1.2.3 Listing

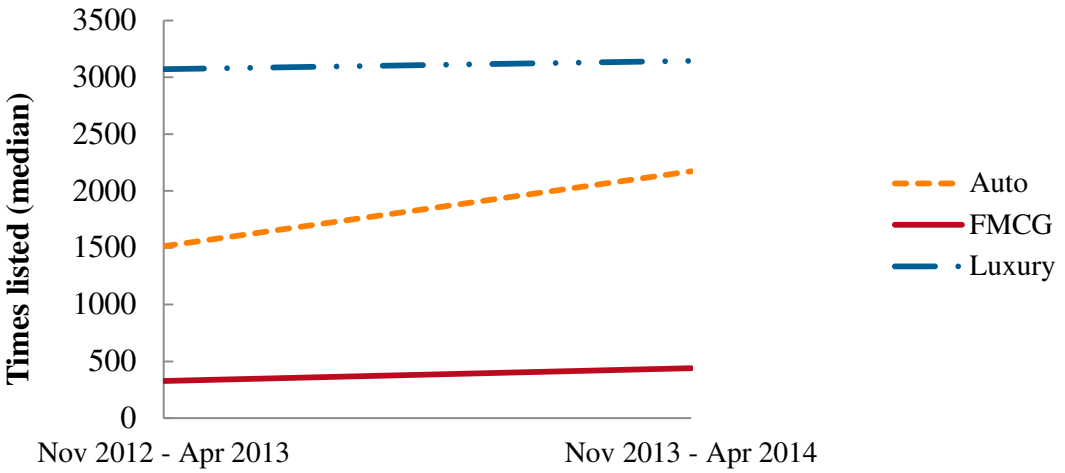
There were also significant differences in the frequency of listing (p < 0.001), with both Auto and Luxury Twitter brands listed significantly more often than FMCG brands, but no significant difference in the frequency of listing between Auto and Luxury (p > 0.1) (see Table 6). While non-followers can list a Twitter handle, following would be expected to be associated with the frequency of listing, since those who are sufficiently interested to list a

Twitter handle are likely to become followers. Despite the increase in the number of followers in every industry from 2013 to 2014, the Auto industry was the only one to experience any meaningful increase in the number of times its brands were listed (from a median of 1513 to 2174 listings) (see Figure 6). Luxury brands, despite having the largest increase in followers, were listed only an additional 75 times from 2013 to 2014.

Table 2-6: Frequency of listing 2014

		Times listed		
Industry	**N**	**Mean**	**Median**	**SD**
Auto	14	3,592	2,174	5,427
FMCG	11	473	439	408
Luxury	7	4,085	3,146	3,549
All	32	2,628	1,440	4,170
Sig: Overall:			Chis = 16.86, $p < 0.001$	
Follow up:			Luxury vs FMCG: $p = 0.004$	
			Luxury vs Auto: p = ns	
			Auto vs FMCG: $p < 0.001$	

Figure 2-6: Change in listing 2013-14



2.4.1.3 What Predicts Follower Engagement?

Certain tweet features were associated with higher levels of retweeting, but what worked varied between the industries, with weblinks being the only feature of tweets which consistently increased retweet levels. Table 7 summarizes the differences in average retweet level for tweets with and without various tweet features. As discussed previously, follower engagement can also be assessed by favoriting, but since favoriting and retweeting were highly correlated ($r = 0.98$, as discussed previously), we report only on retweeting in Table 7. In the following sections, we discuss each of these factors separately, after removing 'private' replies, which would be expected to be retweeted less frequently, since as discussed above, they are visible to fewer people.

2.4.1.3.1 Replies to others

Most brands included only a very small percentage of their replies in their Twitter feed – the more visible replies which we call 'public replies'. For example, 98.3% of replies by the Auto industry were of the 'less public' form – replies which we call 'private' replies – tweets which are visible on the brand's Twitter home page and visible to the recipient and

followers of both Twitter handles, but which do not appear on the Twitter feed of other followers. In comparison with the other two industries, Auto brands were replying more to their followers: in 2014, 73% of their total tweets were replies, up from 57% a year earlier. However, because most of those replies were 'private', Auto brand followers would only see a small percentage of (presumably carefully selected) replies in their Twitter feeds. In contrast, Luxury brands made a much higher proportion of their replies public in 2014 (32.1%). However, Luxury brands were also replying in far fewer tweets compared to a year earlier; in 2013, 35% of all Luxury tweets contained replies (of which 2.3% were public), but in 2014, only 9% were replies (of which 32.1% were public). Ideally, public replies will be those which will be of interest to other followers, but for every industry the average retweet rate of public reply tweets was lower than for tweets which were not replies. The difference was not large, and was of marginal significance only for the Auto industry, (as shown in Table 7) but does suggest that tweets without replies were more interesting to the followers of these brands - and thus more likely to be retweeted.

2.4.1.3.2 Mentions of others

All industries mentioned others in roughly similar proportions of tweets – from a low of 33.6% for the Luxury industry to a high of 37.3 % in the FMCG industry, but including a mention in a tweet did not increase the average retweet rate; to the contrary, in the Auto industry there was marginal evidence that mentioning others *decreased* the retweet rate ($p = .078$). Further analysis investigating whether an increased number of mentions led to higher retweet rates was consistent with that result; there was no evidence that including one or more mentions increased the retweet rate – and for the Auto industry, weak evidence that it decreased the retweet rate. The result is perhaps not surprising, since the major effect of mentions is likely to be to bring a Twitter handle to the notice of users who are mentioned.

This strategy might result in increased followers, and longer term, increased retweet rates, but would not be expected to increase retweet rates for the tweet with the mention.

2.4.1.3.3 Retweets of Others

FMCG brands were distinguished by a significantly higher proportion of retweets of others in their tweets (20.6%), significantly higher than either Auto (8.6%) or Luxury brands (8.3%) (both $p < 0.001$). There were no significant differences in the frequency of retweets of others between Auto and Luxury ($p > .1$). Since further retweets of a retweeted tweet are credited to the original sender, we did not conduct further analysis on retweeted tweets.

2.4.1.3.4 Weblinks

Weblinks appear to be the single most effective feature for increasing retweets. For every industry, tweets with weblinks had significantly more retweets (see Table 7). All industries were using weblinks more than a year earlier – with weblinks in 81.6% of Luxury tweets in 2014, up from 58.2% a year earlier.

2.4.1.3.5 Hashtags

Hashtags were used extensively by all brands, and compared to a year earlier, all industries were using hashtags significantly more, with hashtag use ranging from a low of 48.5% in FMCG companies to a high of 56% for Auto companies. Table 1 shows the most commonly used hashtags for each brand. Tweets with hashtags were, like weblinks, retweeted more often, but there were differences between the industries in the effect of hashtags, with the increase only significant for FMCG ($p < 0.001$, see Table 7). There was a weak nonlinear relationship between the number of hashtags used and the level of retweets for the FMCG industry only, with retweet levels increasing with additional hashtags, up to a maximum of four hashtags. Though there were not many tweets with more than four hashtags, if five or more hashtags were included, the retweet level dropped in every industry.

2.4.1.3.6 Questions

The most retweeted tweet in the 2013-14 period (with 12,604 retweets) was from VW, with a picture of the new VW GTI car, accompanied by the question '*What would you do to drive the Design Vision #VWGTI for a day?*'. Nevertheless, tweets with questions were, on average, retweeted less often in all industries, though the difference was only significant for Luxury brands, where tweets containing questions were retweeted at around half the rate of tweets without questions (see Table 7). Auto had the highest use of question marks, in 17.5% of its tweets in 2014, compared to FMCG (12.2%) and Luxury (3.2%) (all differences significant at $p < 0.001$). However, the Auto industry was using significantly fewer question marks compared to a year earlier, when questions appeared in 20.7% of Auto tweets ($p < 0.001$), with the decrease in part due to an apparent change in strategy by Harley Davidson, where the use of '?' decreased from 33% of tweets to 9%.

2.4.1.3.7 Retweet Call to Action

Only 0.4% of tweets included the word 'retweet' (usually in the form 'Retweet if…'), but those tweets had a much higher frequency of retweeting (see Table 7). Tweets including 'retweet' were retweeted more than 5 times as often for FMCG brands, 9 times for Auto brands, and 15 times more for Luxury compared to tweets without this call-to-action. While this very large boost in retweeting due to inclusion of the word 'retweet' is likely to decrease if more tweets appeal for retweets, the results suggest that a direct call-to-action to 'retweet' or 'favorite' can lead to a very large increase in the frequency of retweeting.

2.4.1.3.8 Service Recovery

Both the Auto and FMCG industries had a significant proportion of tweets addressing customer problems, as assessed by inclusion of the words 'sorry' or 'apologise/apologize'. For example, FMCG brands had one or both words in 4.5% of tweets,

and Auto in 3.5%, with one or both words in 30.7% of tweets from Duracell, and 14.8% from VW. Luxury brands had *no* tweets containing the words 'sorry' or 'apologise/apologize' in either 2013 or 2014. However, with the exception of two tweets (from Nestlé and Kleenex) all tweets with 'sorry' or 'apologise' appeared in 'private' replies. As a result, we did not assess the impact of 'sorry' on retweet rate.

Table 2-7: Tweet content and retweet levels

	Retweets with:		Retweets without:		
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Sig
Public replies					
Auto	52	(188)	25	(167)	0.030
FMCG	5.0	(16.5)	4.1	(21.2)	ns
Luxury	136	(247)	166	(460)	ns
Mentions					
Auto	46	(133)	21	(174)	< 0.001
FMCG	4.9	(30.6)	3.8	(16.0)	0.082
Luxury	171	(521)	162	(413)	ns
Weblinks					
Auto	65	(265)	1.4	(30.1)	< 0.001
FMCG	7.7	(32.5)	1.78	(6.77)	< 0.001
Luxury	187	(481)	16.5	(63.3)	< 0.001
Hashtags					
Auto	38	(204)	12	(114)	< 0.001
FMCG	7.1	(30.4)	1.61	(6.01)	< 0.001
Luxury	178	(521)	151	(365)	ns
Question marks					
Auto	22	(234)	26	(151)	ns
FMCG	4.3	(26.5)	4.1	(20.3)	ns
Luxury	86	(164)	168	(460)	< 0.001
Retweet CTA					
Auto	677	(1803)	24	(150)	0.049
FMCG	36.7	(70.6)	3.8	(19.7)	< 0.001
Luxury	2576	(3113)	154	(373)	0.016

So what can we learn from analyzing what the leading brands are doing on Twitter? The next sections discuss the results, and the implications for other brands.

2.5 Discussion

Despite significant differences between and within industries, the results show that most of these leading brands have large Twitter followings. Three Luxury brands had more than a million followers, but even some FMCG brands achieved high follower numbers: the best performing FMCG brands (Pampers, Johnson & Johnson and Gillette) had higher or similar numbers of Twitter followers than the worst performing Luxury brand, Cartier. The number of direct followers may also under-estimate the reach of a popular tweet: the most retweeted original tweet (by VW): '*What would you do to drive the Design Vision #VWGTI for a day? http://t.co/h6cPQJUo0N'*) was retweeted 12,604 times, thus reaching a far wider audience than followers of the VW handle. This wide reach of organizational messages also seems to be very efficient: while we could not determine the organizational resources allocated to Luxury brands' Twitter activity, none were tweeting much, with the brand with the largest numbers of followers and retweets, Louis Vuitton, sending only 1.3 tweets per day on average.

For Luxury brands, Twitter is also much more effective than a year earlier. All industries have grown their Twitter audiences, with the largest increase for Luxury brands, despite those brands tweeting less than a year earlier. While, as discussed earlier, the number of followers will over-estimate the number who receive a brand's messages due to inactive and/or fake followers, this increase in followers is also evidence that Twitter is becoming a more important channel for brand communication, albeit with a selected group of followers, and with the secondary audience intermittently reached by retweets or discovered due to the

inclusion of popular hashtags (such as 'TeamUSA'). For these leading brands, a sizable Twitter audience can be obtained by sending occasional, but engaging, tweets to followers.

Although user engagement can be assessed using retweets, favorites and the frequency of listing, our results suggest that one measure, retweet frequency, is sufficient to assess user engagement. Retweeting and favoriting are highly correlated, so including both measures in any measurement scheme provides little additional information, and as an indicator of potential secondary reach, retweeting is more important than favoriting because it is a form of electronic WOM. Our results also indicate that the frequency of listing is not a useful measure of user engagement: despite large increases in followers, retweeting and favoriting over the one-year comparison period, the frequency of listing had only increased in any meaningful way in the Auto industry, which on measures of followers, retweeting and favoriting, was less successful than the Luxury brands. Only a very small percentage of Twitter users list Twitter handles, and after allowing for the industry type, the frequency of listing was not associated with other more important measures of user engagement (that is, retweeting or favoriting). It may be time to abandon listing as a measure of Twitter engagement.

There were indications that the Twitter strategies of these brands are evolving, possibly as more evidence emerges about the factors which appear to increase consumer engagement with Twitter. Consistent with evidence that tweets with hashtags are more likely to be retweeted (Rogers, 2014; Suh et al., 2010), and also with the greater potential for tweets with hashtags to be found by non-followers, all industries had markedly increased their use of hashtags. At the same time, however, the value of hashtags appears to be decreasing: after removing private replies, (which are seen by far fewer people and thus are less likely to be

retweeted) inclusion of a hashtag only resulted in a significant increase in retweeting in the FMCG industry.

For weblinks, which increase the potential for user engagement with the brand and which have also been shown to be associated with higher rates of retweeting (Rogers, 2014; Suh et al., 2010), the pattern was more mixed: luxury brands had markedly increased their use of weblinks compared to a year earlier (with weblinks increasing from 58.2% to 81.6% of tweets) but the increase in weblinks by FMCG brands was much smaller – and the Auto brands were using weblinks in fewer tweets than a year earlier. Our results confirm that inclusion of weblinks is associated with higher levels of retweeting, and the benefit of weblinks is likely to increase as brands increasingly use weblinks to embed photos and videos.

While there were large differences in performance and tweet composition within industries, there were larger differences between industries. Luxury brands generally tweeted infrequently, had a very high proportion of weblinks displaying branded products, and rarely engaged with their followers (with very few replies and few retweets, largely restricted to influential sources such as fashion magazines promoting the brands' products). While Luxury brands used hashtags extensively, the most commonly used hashtags were strongly related to the brand names, with limited use of non-brand related hashtags (see Table 1). Auto and FMCG brands were much more engaged with their followers, with much higher proportions of tweets containing replies, retweets of others and for some brands, promotional efforts (competitions or tweets referring to sponsored and/or popular events, such as the Winter Olympics and Super Bowl final). Auto brands, like Luxury, largely used brand-related hashtags, but FMCG companies were more likely to use non-brand related hashtags (see Table 1). These hashtags sometimes referred to sponsored events ('sochi2014') or campaigns

('nodeforestation', 'employment4youth'), but others were popular hashtags (e.g. 'beauty, and 'nyfw' (New York fashion week)), thereby increasing the chance that the tweets would be discovered by a broader audience. While different Twitter activities will be appropriate for different product categories, the relative similarity in Twitter strategies within industries, and differences between – especially for the high involvement industries of Luxury and Auto – suggests that some brands may be using a risk-reduction approach of copying their competitors' Twitter strategies. So compared to a year earlier, Auto brands are engaging more with their followers with replies, retweets and mentions, while in contrast, Luxury brands are engaging less, instead using weblinks heavily to promote visually appealing branded content.

Differences in strategies between industries, and in the level of consumer engagement, are not surprising: a consumer's involvement with a product has been shown to be associated with their likelihood of engaging in electronic word-of-mouth (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). As a result, we would expect lower levels of consumer interaction with FMCG brands than with the higher involvement categories of Luxury or Auto. However, despite some similarities in tweet composition within industries, as discussed above, there were marked differences in success within industries, as measured by consumer engagement (retweets and favorites) and follower numbers. We therefore examined the strategies of the best performers within each industry for retweeting (Louis Vuitton, BMW and Duracell) and for the number of followers (Louis Vuitton, Audi and Pampers). The tweets of the best performers within each industry were retweeted more than twice as often as the second best in the industry, and those with the most followers had follower numbers ranging from 11% more than the second best in the industry (Louis Vuitton) to 50% more than the second best (Audi). So what were these best performers doing? To find out, we examined overall

statistics for the brands, and examined a random sample of 100 tweets from each of the high engagement and high follower brands more closely, looking for usage of embedded photos, videos, and tweet content, in an attempt to identify any differences in tweet construction and content between the best performers in the industries and their less successful peers.

2.5.1 Strategies of the Best Performers

2.5.1.1 Product Based Broadcasting: Louis Vuitton

Louis Vuitton was the best performer across all three industries, with the highest number of followers and the highest level of retweeting. It had the lowest proportion of replies (with only three replies in the second six-month time period, all public replies to celebrities) and only limited mentions of other Twitter handles. While it sometimes retweeted others, those retweets appeared to be largely limited to retweets of authoritative fashion sources promoting Louis Vuitton products (such as @VogueParis and @wallpapermag). In contrast with this lack of interaction with followers, the Louis Vuitton handle made heavy use of weblinks, with embedded photos and videos to display branded products. However in contrast with recommendations that brands should be interactive on Twitter (e.g. Fidelman, 2013), Louis Vuitton decreased its engagement its followers over the one year comparison period, using fewer replies and retweets of others. Instead, the brand appeared to be following a strategy of one-way communication, heavily focused on product promotion – and its high follower numbers and retweet rate show that such a strategy can be very rewarding for a high involvement brand.

2.5.1.2 Product Based Interaction: BMW and Audi

Despite having only 20% of the followers of Audi (the Auto brand with the largest number of followers) BMW had the highest retweet rate within the Auto industry, and like

Louis Vuitton, sent few tweets – an average of only 4.2 per day. Again like Louis Vuitton, its tweets were heavily product based, with extensive use of embedded photos of BMW cars, and BMW related hashtags - although there were no embedded videos in the sampled tweets, so the brand appears to be a slow adopter of this recent Twitter innovation. But in contrast with Louis Vuitton, BMW engaged far more with its followers, with a high proportion of replies (35%) and strategies designed to increase follower engagement. For example, the brand achieved more than 4,600 retweets after calling on recipients to retweet a tweet in order to add their names to a good luck banner for the US Winter Olympics team.

Audi, the Auto brand with the highest number of followers, has been singled out as an example of effective tweet strategy following a widely retweeted tweet during the 2013 Super Bowl final poking fun at Mercedes, an event sponsor, during a blackout (Shively, 2013). But despite its much larger audience, follower engagement with Audi's tweets was much lower than BMW's, with Audi having a retweet rate only one third of BMW's – despite having five times the numbers of followers. So what might explain this greater retweeting by BMW followers? Like BMW, Audi engaged heavily with followers, with 47% of its original tweets being replies (though only 4.8% of those were public replies) and 24.4% retweets of others. BMW's retweet rate was undoubtedly increased by Winter Olympic themed tweets (in part, promoting the BMW sponsorship of the US team bobsled). But Audi also had far fewer embedded photos than BMW, with photos in only 19% of the sample coded tweets, compared to photos in 59% of BMW's sampled tweets, suggesting that BMW's heavier use of embedded photos may have contributed to its high retweet rate.

2.5.1.3 Events and Celebrity Affiliation: Duracell

As discussed above, luxury products and cars are high involvement products, so it is not surprising that many people follow Twitter handles related to such products. The success

of FMCG brands is therefore particularly interesting, because the product category is far lower involvement, so less likely to attract followers. Even within the FMCG category, some brands are likely to be higher involvement and offer more potential for engaging Twitter content - for example Avon, which had the highest percentage of 'retweet' calls to action, and Pampers, with promotions encouraging parents to tweet photos of their babies. Yet the most frequently retweeted FMCG brand was Duracell, with retweet rates more than double the second best performer in this area, Avon. So what was Duracell – a brand best known for batteries - doing to achieve such high retweet rates for such a low involvement product?

Duracell had very high engagement with its followers, with 49% of its original tweets consisting of replies, and 29% retweets of others. It also made frequent real-time references to popular sporting events (the Super Bowl final and the Winter Olympics), and included extensive coverage of three Duracell sponsored athletes who have all overcome adversity, Amy Purdie (a Paralympian who lost both legs at age 19), and two popular and successful NFL players – Derrick Coleman, who is legally deaf, and Patrick Willis, who grew up in abject poverty. Portrayal of all three athletes is associated with Duracell's theme of 'will and power', and brand tweets relating to these athletes achieved very high retweet rates. Duracell also obtained very high retweet rates with tweets related to its campaign of donations for the 'Toys for Tots' appeal, backed by celebrity Ellen DeGeneres. In contrast with Louis Vuitton and BMW, Duracell also made extensive use of video, with 14% of the sampled tweets using embedded videos related to its sponsored athletes and Toys for Tots campaigns.

2.5.1.4 Promotion: Pampers

Like Audi and Louis Vuitton, Pampers had the highest number of followers in its category, with 44% more followers than the second most followed FMCG brand, Avon. Like

Duracell, Pampers had high levels of engagement with followers, with one of the highest percentages of replies (75%), and high levels of mentions. The brand also used multiple tactics to create user engagement, with a high proportion of hashtags, and was one of the highest users of questions, though as shown in Table 7, using questions was associated with a (non-significant) decrease in retweeting for FMCG tweets. Like Duracell, Pampers highlighted sponsorship of the Winter Olympics by its parent company (Procter & Gamble) in its tweets, but instead of focusing on athletes, Pampers encouraged parents to tweet their babies' photos as part of its 'Pampers Game Face' promotion, showing photogenic babies purportedly reacting to Olympic performances. Pampers also encourages and rewards its followers though a loyalty program where they can gain coupons by posting, retweeting and following Pampers on Twitter. Compared to Duracell, Pampers was a much lower user of photos and videos (with no video links in the sampled 100 tweets).

2.5.2 Less Effective Strategies

2.5.2.1 Customer Engagement with Questions

Auto industry brands appeared to be attempting to engage customers by asking questions in tweets, with an industry average of 17.5% of tweets with questions, in sharp contrast with FMCG and Luxury brands, with respective averages of 12.2% and 3.2%. Nine out of the 14 Auto brands had questions in more than 10% of their tweets, led by Nissan, with questions in 27% of tweets, although the Auto brands with the highest number of followers (Audi) and the highest retweet rate (BMW) had markedly lower rates of questions (4.2% and 6.9% respectively). Tweets with questions had significantly lower retweet rates for Luxury brands, and lower (though not significantly lower) rates in the other two industries. Questions may draw follower attention to a tweet, but do not appear to be an effective way to increase

retweeting – and may in fact decrease retweeting, consistent with evidence that tweets with questions are seen as less credible (Castillo et al., 2011).

2.5.2.2 Complaint Handling

Some brands (particularly Duracell, VW, Audi and Pampers) had a high percentage of tweets with apologies, although all except two were in 'private' replies, which while not appearing in followers' Twitter feeds, would still be visible on the brands' Twitter home page. VW made some complaints even more visible, by asking customers with problems to 'Tweet #VWCares for assistance' – thus directing customers to a hashtag referencing a large number of complaints from irate VW customers, for example:

#VWCares @VW do you care my 2011 #jetta (leased) is dead for the 6th time? Less than 3 months since last breakdown! pic.twitter.com/0cf6nP7CCL

@VW #vwcares NOT. Did you know #vw warranties is administered by @Allstate no wonder nothing is covered. AVOID @VW and @Allstate scams!

2.5.2.3 Broadcasting Corporate Communications

Two FMCG brands (Danone and Colgate) appeared to be following a very different strategy, primarily using their tweets to communicate corporate information, with little apparent attempt to interact with users or increase follower engagement (few tweets with weblinks, mentions, retweets or replies). They had the lowest retweet rate of all brands and (with Kellogg's) the lowest number of followers (4,588 for Danone and 9,452 for Colgate, compared to an average 44,744 followers for FMCG brands). Colgate was also the lowest user of hashtags, with only one hashtag (#nodeforestation) used more than once. Both Colgate and Danone were also among the lowest tweeting brands, so they may be using their Twitter handles primarily to disseminate limited and specific company information.

However, when contrasted with the large number of followers of other FMCG brands such as Pampers (with over 108,000 followers) and Duracell (with 70,000 followers), the failure of Colgate and Danone to develop larger Twitter audiences suggests a lost opportunity to interact with their customers.

2.5.3 Implications for Practice

So what lessons can be learned from the Twitter strategies of the leading global brands? Few companies will have a marketing budget or staff to rival these leading brands, but we list below some lessons for lower profile brands.

- *You don't have to be highly engaged with your audience to be very successful*: The success of the luxury brands, which largely used Twitter to broadcast promotional information, shows that if your brand is well known and your product is important to followers, you can achieve a large Twitter audience with a broadcast strategy. For example, Louis Vuitton is very successful in getting considerable consumer engagement (as shown by followers retweeting and favoriting) with a tweet strategy which is primarily product based broadcasting:
  Discover the new colors in this season's #LouisVuitton small leather goods collection at http://t.co/bYYH3t3Wiq http://t.co/J2l88nBnYE (retweeted 6,199 times)
  But products which are less important to customers (like these FMCG brands), and less well-known brands will generally need to use other strategies (as discussed below) to build follower numbers and increase follower engagement.
- *You don't need to tweet a lot to get a large Twitter audience*. More is not better. The most successful Twitter handles were sending fewer than two tweets a day. It's probably better to send fewer more interesting tweets than to send a lot of tweets

which don't interest your followers. For example, nine of the 20 most retweeted tweets within the 2014 period were sent by either Ralph Lauren or Louis Vuitton, which respectively only tweeted 3.3 and 1.3 tweets per day in the period examined. Their tweets frequently featured a captivating call to action, or (for Louis Vuitton) mentioned an influential Twitter handle (that is, one with large number of followers) along with interesting embedded images, for example:

For every retweet, Polo Ralph Lauren FDN will donate $1 to @MichaelJFoxOrg (up to$25K) in support of #Parkinsons http://t.co/oMtSwH14Z3 (retweeted 10,271 times)

Among FMCG brands, Duracell achieved the second highest number of followers despite having one of the lowest frequencies of tweeting, with, as discussed above, frequent references to popular events and celebrities.

- *Don't use your central Twitter handle as a service recovery channel*: While you should respond to customer complaints, use a separate Twitter handle for apologies unless you think your apology is important to many of your followers (for example, if a service is down, and you want to notify all followers). Don't use a hashtag to reference customer service issues (like Volkswagen), because it means that both potential buyers and unhappy customers can see other people's complaints. The best strategy may be to use a dedicated customer service Twitter handle for back and forth communication with followers, and promote this handle in the form of a mention when answering customer queries and list it in the bio section of your Twitter profile.
- *Think about whether to reply privately or publicly*: Even if it's not a response to a customer complaint or problem (where you should never reply publicly, as discussed above), think about how you should reply to tweets. If your reply isn't likely to be interesting to other followers, it's almost certainly better to use the less public form of reply. But effectively done, replies can obtain high retweet rates. For example,

Burberry often used 'private' replies to respond individually to followers, but also achieved high retweet rates with public replies to celebrities, as shown by a reply to Jamie Bower, an English actor, singer and model:

.@JamieBower wearing #Burberry sunglasses from The Trench Collection at the Menswear A/W14 show on Wednesday #LCM http://t.co/tnfSJYtD2p (retweeted 1282 times)

- *Use popular hashtags, but use them judiciously:* Tweets with hashtags were retweeted more often, though the result was only significant for the FMCG industry. For example, Duracell achieved high tweet rates with a tweet referring to popular NFL star Derrick Coleman and the Seattle Seahawks, and containing an embedded YouTube video.

  We trust your power, Derrick. Congrats to you and your team. #Seahawks http://t.co/0evcV90c1E (retweeted 534 times)

  However, the results also suggest that having too many hashtags can actually decrease the retweet rate: tweets with five or more hashtags had lower retweet rates than tweets containing four or fewer hashtags – and also lower retweet rates than no hashtags.

- *Use mentions if appropriate, but don't expect them to increase the retweet rate short-term*: The study found no evidence that including a mention increases the retweet rate for an individual tweet. This doesn't mean that including mentions can't be an effective strategy, however: particularly for less well-known Twitter handles, including relevant mentions can be effective at bringing the Twitter handle to the notice of the people mentioned – with the potential for them to follow and retweet the handle's future tweets. Including mentions of interesting Twitter handles may also add value for a Twitter handle's own followers, but if the mentions aren't seen as relevant by followers, a mention could decrease follower engagement – and

potentially even lead to lower retweet rates, as we saw with the marginally lower rate of retweeting for Auto industry tweets with mentions.

- *Weblinks and images create interest*: More than anything else, weblinks increased retweeting for these brands. For example, Tiffany and many of the other luxury brands sent tweets with highly attractive product images, supplemented by positive messages, often referencing Tiffany's distinctive blue box:

  The best surprises come wrapped in blue: http://t.co/Y8xVQZfkuj (retweeted 5,814 times)

  Links with photos and videos embedded in tweets can be particularly effective in making tweets stand out for followers, or you can use weblinks to increase customer traffic to your website.

- *Celebrities create interest*: Duracell's strategy of sponsoring less well-known sportspeople (such as a Paralympian such like Amy Purdy, rather than an Olympian), and associating them with Duracell's theme of 'power', is a good example of cost-effective sponsorship. For example, Duracell continued its coverage of Amy Purdy after the Winter Olympics with references to her appearance on Dancing with the Starts:

  .@AmyPurdyGurl: From #Sochi2014 to @DancingABC w/ @DerekHough here's to living life without limits. Her story: http://t.co/0CQF1tfwi5 #DWTS (181 retweets)

  Small businesses won't be able to afford to sponsor a national team or high-profile athlete, but might be able to cost-effectively sponsor an emerging local athlete, team or musician.

- *Questions don't seem to create interest*: Many Twitter handles use questions in an apparent attempt to create user engagement. Tweets with questions can achieve high retweet rates –as discussed above the most retweeted tweet contained a question mark

- but on average, tweets with questions were retweeted less than tweets without questions e.g.

  Confession time: what's the strangest food craving you've had during #pregnancy?

  (Pampers, only 1 retweet)

  And the winners are ? #hacklorealdpp http://t.co/GVf5anqYD3 via @begeek

  (Loreal, zero retweets)

- *Including a 'retweet' request can increase retweeting*: A call to action to 'retweet' was associated with large increases in retweeting for every industry, e.g.

  Retweet if you love heated seats in the winter. http://t.co/u0m3vykff5

  (VW, retweeted 8938 times)

  Consumers may quickly become immune to a suggestion to 'retweet' if too many tweets use this tactic, but for now, asking followers to 'retweet' can increase response rates. It is likely that a similar appeal such as 'Favorite if…' could have similar results.

2.5.4 Limitations

While the results provide insight into the Twitter strategies of leading consumer brands, the results must be interpreted in the light of some limitations. We examined only one Twitter handle from each company, albeit the highest profile handle. A study which attempts to identify and analyze all Twitter handles under a company's name may show that different handles are used for different purposes (e.g. for corporate communications, complaints handling, and customer engagement). As discussed, the results show the effect of different Twitter strategies for brands with high consumer recognition, so different strategies may be needed for less well-known brands, as discussed below.

2.6 Future Research Directions

This chapter has examined different uses of Twitter, but the global brands explored in this research have a natural advantage on Twitter because they are well-known, and are therefore likely to be able to more easily obtain Twitter followers. Future research could explore what smaller firms are doing on Twitter, and investigate those which are successful in obtaining high follower and retweet rates. Other useful directions for research include dedicated purpose Twitter handles (such as customer service handles) in order to investigate how Twitter can be used as a focused communication channel. Yet another avenue for research could be to examine how organizations are using new Twitter features (such as promoted tweets or a 'buy now' button), and investigate the extent to which these features increase follower engagement. Finally, analyzing consumer tweets about brands can provide further insights into what drives customer engagement on Twitter.

2.7 Conclusion

The results show that for premier brands, Twitter can be a very effective way to communicate with consumers, with the best performing Luxury brands achieving millions of followers – for Louis Vuitton, with only 1.3 tweets per day. More surprisingly, the results shown that even low involvement products can obtain very large follower numbers, with the best performing FMCG brand (Pampers) having more than a 100,000 followers with fewer than thirteen tweets per day – and receiving more than 400 retweets for its most popular tweet, so through retweets, reaching an even wider audience.

The results also show evolution of Twitter tactics over the comparison period, with much higher use of hashtags across all industries, but diverging practice in other areas. Although social media is often argued to be an interactive medium, Luxury brands' Twitter handles – the industry with the largest number of followers- had become significantly *less*

engaged with their followers over the year, with fewer replies, mentions and retweets of others, but those brands had still experienced a large increase in the number of followers. In contrast, Auto brands were replying much more in their tweets (73%, up from 57%), but had not achieved the same increase in retweeting. Some brands can clearly be very successful on Twitter with very limited interaction with followers.

The comparison across industries also revealed divergent strategies: Luxury brands were primarily broadcasting favorable company information using weblinks and embedded photos, while Auto and FMCG brands were primarily interactive. Some FMCG brands primarily posted corporate communications news, with very little interaction.

While these results relate to leading companies with high market visibility and presumably with significant social media budgets, the results suggest some directions for less prominent brands on Twitter. Firstly, leveraging on popular events with timely tweets, like some of these successful FMCG brands, can increase follower engagement and expose tweets to wider audiences. Secondly, while interaction is often argued to be an important part of social media strategy, the results show that a brand can be successful with a one-way broadcasting strategy on Twitter, although this approach is likely to be more difficult for brands without an established reputation. Alternatively, a brand can choose to interact with its followers, retweet selected tweets, respond to replies and use mentions in an attempt to increase follower engagement. Whatever the brand's strategy, selected use of weblinks to create interest and hashtags to expose tweet content to non-followers, is likely to assist in increasing the retweet rate.

Finally, the results show that among these leading brands, different companies are following, and being successful with, very different strategies. As with any marketing action, deciding on the communication strategy, and using appropriate measures to assess the results

of that strategy will give the organization the best chance of effective Twitter use – and of modifying Twitter practice as the platform changes to allow new methods of marketing communication and advertising.

Acknowledgment:

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Frank Burton, who provided invaluable help in developing our Excel coding schemes.

2.8 Appendix

2.8.1 Additional Reading List

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2.8.2 Key Terms and Definitions

- Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM): 'Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.' (Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? Journal of interactive marketing, 18(1), p. 39)
- 'Embedded' content/media in tweets: photos or video which are 'embedded' show directly within Twitter, saving users from needing to click on the link to view the media.
- Favorite: Favoriting is a feature on Twitter that allows a user to mark a tweet as a favorite (and thus easily see it later). To favorite a tweet, a follower clicks the 'Favorite' link beneath any tweet.
- Hashtag: A Twitter hashtag refers to a topic, keyword or phrase preceded by the '#' symbol. Hashtags are used to categorize messages on Twitter, and thus make them easily findable by people who search for the hashtag.
- Interbrand Best Global Brands: Interbrand brand consultancy publishes an annual ranking of the best global brands, chosen based on the brands' financial performance, role, and strength. Global brands qualify for the list if they have a presence on at least three major continents, as well as broad geographic coverage in growing and emerging markets. Thirty percent of revenues must come from outside the home country, and no more than 50% of revenues should come from any one continent. (Source: www.interbrand.com)

- Mention: A mention refers to a tweet that includes a reference to another Twitter user, by placing the @symbol in front of that user's handle or username (e.g. '@username').
- Public Reply: If a user wants their followers to see their replies to another user or brand, they use '.@reply' instead of '@reply'. The tweet will show up in the sender's timeline and the timeline of anyone who follows them, in contrast with an '@reply' (i.e. one which does not start with a period), which while showing on the Twitter page of the sender, only appears in the Twitter feed of the recipient and anyone who follows both the sender and recipient.
- Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI): the profit from a particular activity compared with the amount spent on marketing it in a particular period. This shows how effectively the company is spending money on marketing. (source: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/business-english/return-on-marketing-investment)
- Retweet: A retweet is a tweet which has been forwarded or 'resent' on Twitter by someone other than the sender. To 'retweet' is thus to send someone else's tweet to one's own followers. Retweeting is a common activity on Twitter and reflects the popularity of individual tweets.
- Twitter Username / Handle: A Twitter username is an alternative name for a Twitter handle, and represents the name each user has selected to be known as on Twitter. Usernames are limited to a maximum of 15 characters, and each Twitter username has a unique URL, with the username added after twitter.com (i.e. www.twitter.com/username).

3: HELPING THOSE WHO HELP US: CO-BRANDED AND CO-CREATED TWITTER PROMOTION IN CSR PARTNERSHIPS

3.1 Overview of Paper

This chapter presents a study describing Twitter communications between a popular non-profit organisation (Toys for Tots or T4T) and its network of corporate partners, and compares this activity with the public relations efforts of the non-profit organisation (NPO) in traditional news media. In contrast to the study presented in Chapter 2 that reviewed brands' activities on Twitter and their effectiveness in terms of the impact on consumers, this study focuses on corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices on the social medial platform and the analysis is based around dyadic Twitter communications between involved stakeholders. Archival public tweet data for both Toys for Tots and its partners was downloaded and analysed to identify references to T4T and other partners. In addition, U.S.-based press reports mentioning any partner and T4T were identified using the Factiva and ProQuest databases, for the same time period. The study tests several propositions, including the association between a corporate partner's contribution and the extent of the NPO's involvement in promotion of donors, and the presence of reciprocity of communications between the NPO and its partners and how it changes, depending on the level of a partner's financial support. The extent of communication reciprocity is also analysed between partners in the network, providing an insight into a new area of coopetition when organisations that compete make an effort to cooperate by promoting each other and reciprocating such activity.

The study draws attention to an innovative way to increase customer awareness of organisational CSR activities via social media, such as promoting these activities and partnerships through co-branded and co-created communications on Twitter in order to

achieve reciprocal benefits for both the NPO and its partners. However, the results indicate surprisingly limited use of Twitter by T4T for promoting its corporate partnerships, and by partners to promote their support of T4T. There was limited evidence of reciprocity between the NPO and its partners, and no evidence of reciprocal promotion between corporate partners. The key contribution of the study is that it extends the analysis of Twitter communications beyond partner/NPO dyads to examine the use of Twitter within the network of an NPO and its different partner organisations. This approach addresses the objective of the thesis to study the dynamics of the Twitter network of an organisation and its partners. The study is important because it uncovers limited use of social media use in CSR partnerships, and identifies how more innovative approaches using social media such as Twitter could provide benefits for both the NPO and its corporate partners. This finding is in line with another objective of the thesis to provide advice on the implications of using Twitter for marketing where organisational control of others' activities is limited.

As a second author on this publication, I contributed to the idea, which was first identified by my principal supervisor (the first author of the paper), and downloaded and manipulated tweet data. I also helped with the statistical analysis of tweets and identification of key literature. In addition, I assisted with final editing and proofreading of the paper.

The study has recently been published in the Journal of Brand Management[7]. As with the previous chapter study, in order to use a consistent style throughout the thesis, this work has been reformatted, with the references combined in one reference list at the end of the thesis.

[7] Burton, S., Soboleva, A., Daellenbach, K., Basil, D. Z., Beckman, T., & Deshpande, S. (2017). Helping those who help us: Co-branded and co-created Twitter promotion in CSR partnerships. *Journal of Brand Management, 24*(4), 322-333.

Helping Those Who Help Us: Co-branded and Co-Created Twitter Promotion in CSR Partnerships

Abstract

Partnerships between brands and non-profit-organisations (NPOs) must be strategically managed for each to maximise their benefit from the relationship. Twitter, with its potential for pass-along of messages, provides an ideal channel for reciprocal promotion within the network of an NPO and its supporting brands. For any one brand within that network, brand building will be amplified if messages are passed on to others using co-branded and/or co-created communications, providing an opportunity for a brand to engage a new audience of consumers who are part of another organisation's network. This research examines the extent of co-branded and co-created communications by a popular NPO and its network of corporate partners on Twitter, and compares that Twitter promotion with promotion of the same activity in traditional news media. The findings revealed surprisingly limited use of Twitter to promote brands' partnership efforts with the NPO, and only limited evidence of the expected reciprocity between the NPO and its partners. We find even less evidence of co-branded communications between partner brands in the network, and no co-created communications. The results have important implications for CSR partnerships, suggesting that more innovative use of social media could provide reciprocal benefits from brands' partnerships with NPOs.

Keywords: Co-created communication, brands, corporate social responsibility, reciprocity, coopetition, Twitter

3.2 Introduction/Background

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities can enhance brand and company reputations, engender goodwill among consumers, and influence the way that customers evaluate a company's products (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Partnerships with charities or causes can allow innovative programs by firms for whom it is unrealistic to come out with truly exceptional offerings, such as Avon's promotion of fundraising for breast cancer (Aaker, 2007). Yet without awareness of an organisation's CSR activities, customers are unable to reward such activities (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013) – for example, by giving their patronage to organisations that engage in CSR. So communication of brand activities, whether in CSR or other areas, is a key component of a holistic approach to brand management, or 'brand chartering' (Macrae & Uncles, 1997).

Apart from its potential for enhancing the brand and company reputation, supporting a cause (such as breast cancer fundraising) creates the opportunity for innovative communications to engage consumers, as both the supporting partner (such as Avon) and the cause (breast cancer charities) can together, or separately, promote the brand's support to their respective networks. If such a partnership moves beyond a one-off exchange, it can be positioned on a continuum of co-branding, with mere sponsorship at one end, and a joint partnership at the other (Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003). Consistent with the common practice of co-branding products that has emerged over the past three decades (Besharat & Langan, 2014), a communication could then be considered to be 'co-branded' if it involves the use of both the partner and cause brands. Communications may also be 'co-created' if two or more parties are involved in developing a message, consistent with the practice of co-creation of marketing communications by consumers and organisations (Bacile, Ye, & Swilley, 2014). However, in contrast with the bilateral corporate partnership involved when

an organisation donates to a cause, it is common for multiple organisations, sometimes including competing organisations, to sponsor a common cause. Under these circumstances, any communication by a sponsoring organisation can promote the cause and its own CSR efforts, but can also (either inadvertently or intentionally) promote the efforts of other organisations, possibly including competitors. In such circumstances, co-branded or co-created communications can therefore result in a form of 'coopetition', where competitors both compete and cooperate with each other (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). In this paper, we examine one such case, where a variety of organisations, including competitors, promote one cause, Toys for Tots, and thus have the opportunity to engage their customers with the use of co-branded and co-created communications on social media – in this case, Twitter. We examine the extent to which Twitter is used by brands to leverage their CSR efforts through co-branded and co-created communications, and the extent to which the cause promotes its corporate partner brands using the same mechanisms. First, however, we provide a brief review of the literature on CSR partnerships as a mechanism for brand building.

3.2.1 CSR partnerships as part of brand building

Corporate contributions to non-profit-organisations (NPOs), through donations, sponsorship, cause-related marketing or another form of partnership, are very common. These practices can be viewed as demonstrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Kotler & Lee, 2005), and for simplicity in this study, we refer to the relationship between a corporate supporter and the benefiting NPO as a 'CSR partnership'. We refer to a brand/company providing support or a donation as a 'partner', and to the benefitting NPO as the 'cause'. With the exception of a purely philanthropic gift, motivated by altruism and without expectation of benefit, these partnerships involve an expectation of a return, or reciprocal

benefit to the partner brand. Partners typically expect a benefit for one or more stakeholder groups, such as customers, media, internal staff, suppliers, distributors, rights holders or shareholders (Meenaghan, McLoughlin, & McCormack, 2013). Specific motives for company participation in CSR may include increasing brand awareness or managing brand image with customers, aligning or re-positioning the brand alongside the cause, portraying a sense of social responsibility to multiple stakeholder groups, managing relationships within the supply chain, or encouraging a sense of belonging with employees (Madden, Scaife, & Crissman, 2006; Meenaghan et al., 2013; Nickell, Cornwell, & Johnston, 2011) CSR can therefore be seen as a process of investment in social capital with the expectation of long-term payback in terms of reputation, and possibly reciprocal favours (Worthington, Ram, & Jones, 2006). In other words, a partner is likely to expect some reciprocal benefits from the NPO in return for its support, and these benefits often relate directly to the brand.

How these benefits accrue to the partner is dependent on the nature of the partnership, any agreed benefits to be provided by the cause, and the leveraging activities of the partner (Ruth & Simonin, 2003; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). The partner may undertake advertising, public relations, internal communications, and direct mail to promote the cause (e.g., Nickell et al., 2011). In some cases, CSR may evolve into co-branding or other forms of partnership between the sponsor and the cause, but Besharat and Langan (2014) distinguish co-branding as distinct from other practices such as brand alliances, sponsorship or cause-related marketing. They suggest brand alliances are oriented to increasing awareness and/or transferring brand values, but do not go so far as to co-develop a new ‘product’ as would be the case in co-branding. They further suggest that sponsorship and cause-related marketing are more transactional, without the long-term commitment of a co-branding relationship. Sponsorship and cause related marketing may be more transactional, and oriented to building

brand awareness, but they may also be developed into co-branding (e.g. Motion et al., 2003). We take the perspective that there exists a continuum of CSR partnerships relevant to brands and building brand awareness. At one end, the partner donates to a cause and promotes this support to enhance its brand image and awareness, but the strategies of the two parties are largely independent, and would not fulfil the criteria of a partnership. At the other end is a long-term, integrated co-branding of the two organisations, where communicating to consumers and other stakeholders can help to achieve the branding objectives of each party.

Whether the relationship between a partner and an NPO is purely transactional or a long-term partnership, social media provide innovative ways for companies to communicate their CSR activities in pursuit of their branding objectives. Recent research has suggested that social media and public relations may be the channels of choice to facilitate a positive effect of CSR activities (Chernev & Blair, 2015), but did not investigate *how* social media could be used to promote CSR activities. This study examines the use of Twitter, a social media channel, in such partnerships, an area in need of illumination (Meenaghan et al., 2013). However, we go beyond the partner/cause dyad to examine the use of Twitter within the network of a cause and its different partner organisations.

3.2.2 Brand building and co-created communication on social media

In the past, primary communication media would include TV, radio, and print media, but social media platforms are now important channels for sponsorship activities (Meenaghan et al., 2013). Promotion of CSR partnership efforts on social media is particularly appropriate, since there is evidence of a relationship between individuals' social media use and their ethical engagement with NPOs, including monetary donations and volunteerism (Mano, 2014). In addition, evidence that brand community members are

particularly concerned with brand ads (Muniz Jr & O'Guinn, 2001) would suggest that the social media network of a brand – or a cause – would be more engaged in online communications with that brand.

The community focus of social media therefore provides an ideal platform for a brand to leverage its CSR activities, by bringing together a 'community' of parties aligned with a cause. A brand community creates collective value by 'impression management' regarding the brand or by evangelising its benefits and justifying its actions (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), so favourable communications about the brand sent to this group can help to achieve the brand's objectives. However as discussed above, the reach of a brand's communication will increase if a message is disseminated beyond its own follower network to the network of a cause or to the networks of other partner organisations. At the same time, social media provide a channel for a cause to separately or jointly promote one or more partner organisations, and thus to increase any reputation or other benefit to those organisations by their support of the cause. The use of social media in marketing has been examined in both profit and non-profit contexts, but the focus of research has tended to be on the consumer as a recipient and potential sharer of content (e.g., Araujo et al., 2015; Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). In the present research, we explore the use of Twitter within the previously unexplored area of reciprocal promotion between an NPO and its supporting brands, and also within the network of those supporting brands.

Among social media, Twitter (a microblogging platform) would seem to have particular potential for co-branded and co-created communications to promote CSR activities. An organisation can 'mention' another in a tweet, incorporating an additional brand into the tweet, which thus becomes a 'co-branded' tweet. A mention in a tweet means that the tweet is forwarded to the mentioned brand (or 'Twitter handle'), thus encouraging that brand to pass

on, or 'retweet' the message to its own follower network. The retweet may be modified, or forwarded without alteration by the mentioned account to its followers. In either case, the retweet becomes a form of co-created communication, with each party contributing to the dissemination (by forwarding), and potentially to the construction (by modification) of the message. So a partner might mention a cause in its tweets, and the cause could retweet the message to its own followers, achieving wider dissemination of the message and brand, by passing on (and thus implicitly endorsing) the partner's message. Thus while the partner is likely to be looking for a benefit through its sponsorship, *both* the partner *and* the cause can use Twitter to provide reciprocal benefits. Similarly, one partner organisation can mention another in a tweet promoting its own efforts, and hope that the mentioned partner retweets that message to its own network, thereby creating reciprocal benefits for both partners through co-created communication. If two competitors support the same cause, co-branded and/or co-created tweets can therefore be used to promote both organisations, in a form of coopetition.

Based on the preceding discussion, Twitter therefore allows partners to enhance their brand reputation by showcasing their CSR activities, and allows causes to demonstrate reciprocity by promoting partners' efforts through co-branded tweets (with mentions) or by co-created tweets (through retweets). However, while previous studies have addressed NPOs' use of social media (e.g., Briones et al., 2011), as discussed above, their focus has been on communication with the public and consumers. There does not appear to have been a single study considering reciprocal promotion between a supporting partner and a cause on Twitter. This research addresses that gap, and goes further, by extending the analysis beyond the dyad of a cause and a partner to the entire network of partners of the cause. Specifically, the research examines Twitter and press promotion by the network of a major U.S.-based,

internationally active NPO - Toys for Tots (T4T). This is therefore the first study to examine social media activity by both non-profit and corporate users promoting the same cause, thus assessing the joint and interactive nature of microblogging to engage customers in brand-building, and leverage multiple brands' activities in brand-building. We also compare the frequency of organisations' promotion of their association with T4T on Twitter with promotion on another medium – press reports – that does not facilitate co-creation of communications.

Toys for Tots (T4T) was selected as the focal NPO due to its high profile in the U.S., generally positive reputation, and the concentrated timing of its efforts. T4T was founded in 1947 and is active in all 50 U.S. states, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands (Toys for Tots, 2015c). The organisation collects toys or monetary donations for children in underprivileged families for Christmas. As such, most of its public activity is focused on the period directly before Christmas, which is likely to encourage press and Twitter coverage each year around that time.

3.2.3 Hypothesis development

Promotion of own CSR activities: Despite longstanding recommendations that companies should work on increasing CSR awareness levels, there is evidence that not all firms appreciate the importance of customer awareness of their CSR activities (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). Previous research has shown a positive association between press mentions of CSR activities and the advertising spending of a firm (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). Press mentions are not under the direct control of an organisation, but can clearly be influenced by dissemination of media releases and other public relations tactics. In contrast, Twitter provides a mechanism for an organisation to directly promote its own CSR activities, so the

frequency of mentions of CSR activities by the organisation's Twitter handles is a measure of the extent to which it uses the channel to promote those efforts. Following the observed association between press mentions of the CSR activities of a firm and its advertising spending (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013), we would expect an organisation to promote its CSR efforts in the press and on Twitter. We would therefore expect to see a correlation between the frequency of Twitter and press promotion of those activities. As such we test for an association between Twitter mentions of T4T by a partner, and press reports containing the names of both T4T and the partner in Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1: Promotion of CSR activities: There will be a positive association between partner mentions of T4T on Twitter and press mentions of the partner's support of T4T.

Partners' CSR activities will vary, and those that invest more would be expected to make greater efforts to promote those activities, in order to leverage their support of the cause. T4T has five 'star' levels of sponsor (or 'partner') support, ranging from five-star partners contributing at least $US1 million in cash or $2 million in toys, to one-star partners contributing at least $25K in cash or $100K in toys. Higher-level partners would therefore be expected to have a higher incentive, and possibly more developed mechanisms, to promote their CSR efforts on Twitter and in mainstream press. We therefore test for an association between the size of the partner's contribution to T4T (as shown by its star level) and the frequency of mentions of the partner and T4T in tweets (in Hypothesis 2a) and in press reports (in Hypothesis 2b):

H2a: Investment and Twitter promotion: There will be a positive association between partner star level and partner mentions of T4T on Twitter, and

H2b: Investment and press promotion: There will be a positive association between partner star level and press mentions of the partner's association with T4T.

Reciprocity: Reciprocity is recognised as an important step in the public relations (PR) process (Kelly, 2001). Twitter provides a cost-effective way for NPOs to demonstrate reciprocity by recognising the contribution of partner organisations: one party (e.g. NPO A) can mention another (e.g. Brand B) in a tweet, and thus encourage a reciprocal mention and/or retweeting of that message. So a cause can mention a partner, who can then retweet that message, or a partner can mention the NPO, thus encouraging the NPO to mention that partner. We therefore expect to see a positive association between mentions of T4T in a partner's tweets and vice versa, suggesting *H3:*

Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive association between partner Twitter mentions of T4T and vice versa.

While, as discussed above, a cause is likely to promote a partner, in a multi-sponsor partnership, the focal cause may tweet about partners with differing frequencies. Given the norm of reciprocity (Cialdini, 1993), those who do more for a cause are likely to expect to receive more from that cause (Kelly, 2001). So if T4T is using Twitter strategically to promote its partners, T4T's frequency of partner mentions would be expected to be positively correlated with the partner's level of support, or star level, suggesting *H4*:

Hypothesis 4: The frequency of T4T's promotion of partners by Twitter mentions will be positively associated with partners' sponsorship status level.

With its visibility and potential for interaction, Twitter is also ideal for encouraging reciprocity within a network of partners, even with competitors. Twitter allows partner organisations to simultaneously promote other partners, by mentioning them in tweets, while

promoting their own activity, in a form of coopetition, where competitors both compete and cooperate with each other (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Such a mention may encourage the identified partner to reciprocate by referring to the mentioning partner. If partners are responding to such mentions with reciprocal references, we would expect to see a pattern of reciprocity between partners, suggesting *H5:*

Hypothesis 5: Partner reciprocity: there will be a positive correlation between Twitter mentions of, and mentions by, partners.

The next section outlines the methods used to test the hypotheses.

3.3 Method

A list of 61 corporate sponsor brands (or 'partners') and their donation (or 'star') level was obtained from the T4T website in November 2014, and subsequently updated (to reflect recently added partners) in March 2015. Web and Twitter searches were conducted to identify any U.S.-based Twitter handles for these partner brands. All identified handles were checked to ensure that the handle was a verified Twitter handle. (A handle can be 'verified' by Twitter to show that it represents the real brand (or person) and not an imposter. Verification is indicated on the brand's Twitter page by a blue checkmark icon next to the handle name.)

No Twitter handle could be found for 11 partners, resulting in a final list of 63 active Twitter handles for 50 partners. All tweets from these handles for the period November 1, 2014 to January 1, 2015 were downloaded using the Twitonomy premium service, resulting in 32,641 tweets, or an average of 513.8 (SD = 686.5) tweets sent per active handle, each with an average of 194,699 (SD = 606,350) followers. Tweets referring to alternative forms of 'Toys for Tots' (i.e. 'T4T', 'TforT', and 'Toys4Tots') were searched for and extracted

using search functions, resulting in a final data set of 452 partner tweets referring to T4T in one of its name formats. These tweets were analysed to identify references to other partners. U.S.-based T4T Twitter accounts were also identified using web and Twitter searches, resulting in a total of 19 active T4T Twitter handles. Over the same time period (i.e. November 1, 2014 to January 1, 2015) these handles posted 1,624 tweets (or an average of 85.5 per active handle (SD = 152.3)) to an average of 727.6 (SD = 1,384) followers. Search functions were used to identify 259 T4T tweets containing references to one or more partner brands. Because tweet counts were highly skewed, nonparametric tests were used to assess relatedness i.e. Kendall's tau to test the association between tweet mentions of and by T4T, and an ordinal extension of the Wilcoxon rank-sum test to test tweet and press mentions by partner star level.

U.S.-based press reports mentioning any partner and 'Toys for Tots' or 'Toys 4 Tots' (or any other name variation) were identified from the Factiva database, which contains a very wide range of press sources, including newspapers, online news, and press wire services. The search was consistent with Servaes and Tamayo (2013), but extended their method by including the ProQuest database, in order to include additional press sources not covered by Factiva. The ProQuest search identified a small number of additional press reports, along with a large number of reports already obtained from Factiva. Duplicate results from Factiva and ProQuest were discarded, and the remaining reports reviewed to ensure that the partner and T4T were mentioned in the same context. Reports where both were not mentioned in the same context were discarded. This resulted in a total of 110 press reports, or an average of 1.80 per partner (SD = 4.38).

Results were analysed using Minitab (Version 17) for statistical tests and also through social network analysis, to provide a visual representation of the network (Borgatti,

Everett, & Johnson, 2013). For this, UCINET 6.605 (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002) and NetDraw 2.158 (Borgatti, 2002) were employed.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Publicising own activity

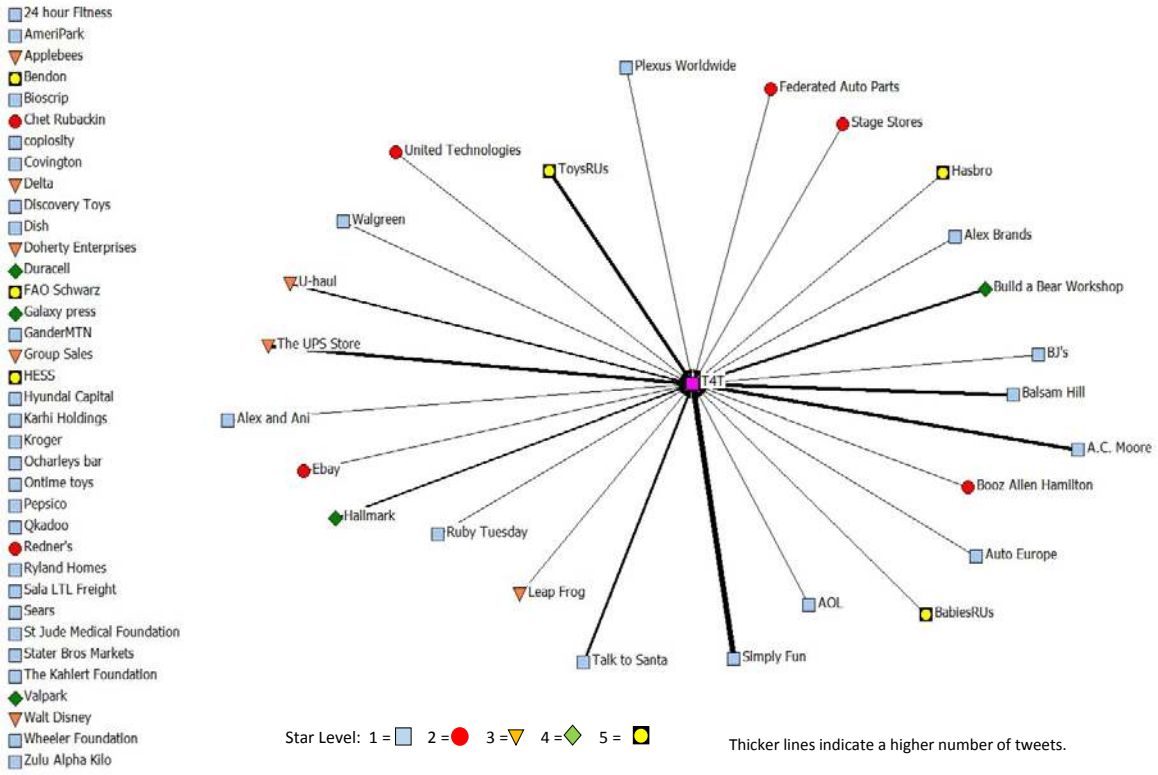
While many partners used Twitter and/or media to publicise their support of T4T, there was surprisingly limited use of both channels. Two partners (Toys 'R' Us and The UPS Store) each had more than 20 press reports associating their names with T4T, but the majority of partners (62.3%) had none. Use of Twitter by partners to promote T4T, and/or their own support of T4T, also varied widely. There was a total of 452 partner mentions of T4T, but after excluding 11 partners who were inactive on Twitter, and 24 who did not mention T4T in their tweets, the median partner mentions of T4T was 1. Press promotion was a very poor predictor of Twitter promotion: there was only a very weak association between the frequency of partner tweets mentioning T4T and the number of joint press mentions of the partner and T4T ($p = .08$), thus providing only weak support for H1. There was no significant ordinal trend for frequency of partner Twitter mentions of T4T by star level ($p > .1$), thus H2a is rejected. There was a marginal ordinal trend between star level and press mentions ($p = .099$), consistent with H2b. However, three of the five-star partners and four of the five four-star partners had no press coverage linking them to T4T, so many of the highest-level partners apparently received no press coverage of their support for T4T.

Figure 1 shows the tweets by partners about T4T, with different partner star levels shown in different shapes and colours. The number of tweets by each partner mentioning T4T is indicated by the width of the line, relative to Simply Fun, the partner who mentioned T4T most often in its tweets (103 times). Partners who did not tweet about T4T are listed on the

left side of the figure. (Note the length of lines in this and other figures varies only to allow partner names to be shown, and does not provide additional information.)

Figure 3-1: Number of partner tweets mentioning T4T

(Partners with no tweets mentioning T4T listed on left)



3.4.2 Reciprocity: Helping those who help us

Promotion of partners in T4T tweets was generally low, relative to the total volume of tweets sent by T4T. Out of 1,624 tweets sent by T4T handles in the study period, only 259 (16%) mentioned partners - an average of 6.5 mentions per partner. However, the distribution of mentions was highly skewed: the most frequently mentioned partner (Toys 'R' Us, a five-star partner), was mentioned 66 times, but 21 partners (including one five-star partner) were not mentioned in any T4T tweets. There was significant evidence of reciprocal tweets

between T4T and partners, with a significant ordinal association between the number of partner mentions of T4T and mentions by T4T ($p < 0.001$), consistent with H3. However, a majority of the data points were clustered at low levels, with the relationship largely driven by a small number of partners that were high in both mentions of T4T and mentions by T4T. Nearly half (43%) of the tweets by T4T consisted of retweets of partner tweets, in other words co-created tweets, such as one retweet by T4T promoting Duracell:

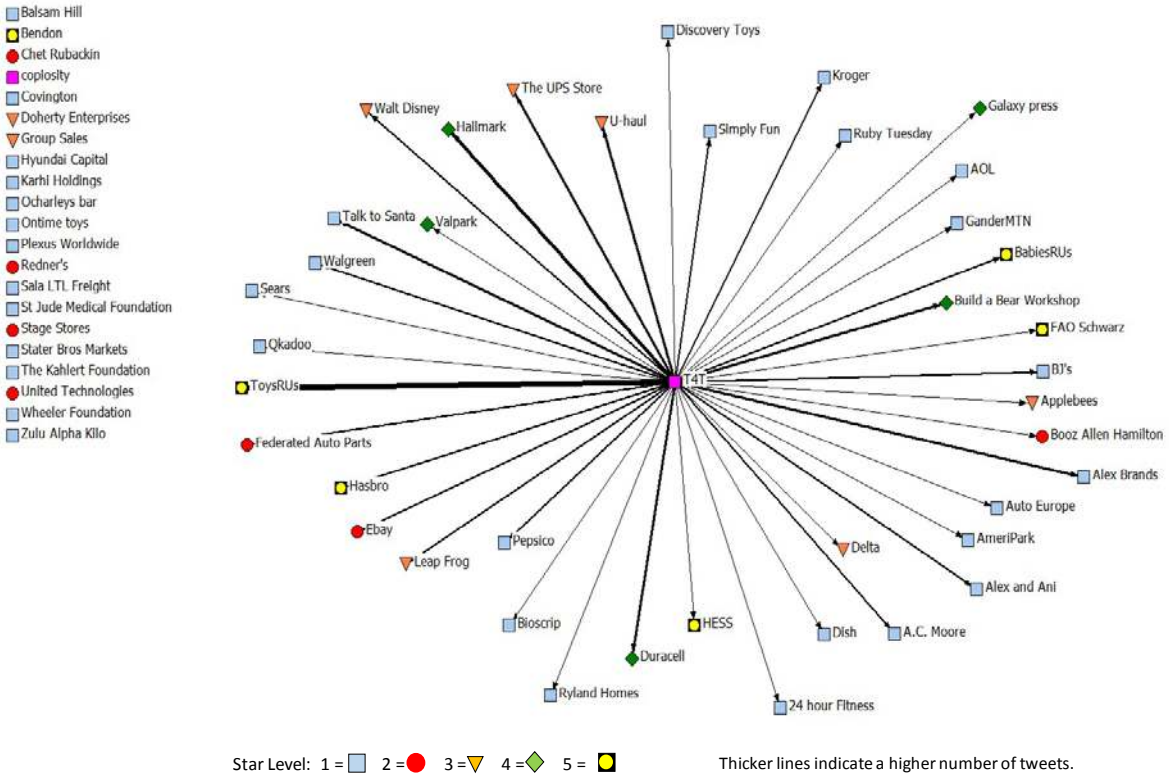
RT @Duracell: This season, every purchase of eligible @Duracell packs will trigger a donation to @ToysForTots_USA.

However, all T4T retweets mentioning partners, like the example above, were unmodified retweets. Thus, T4T missed out on the opportunity to more directly endorse Duracell's and other brands' donations by modifying tweets to include an acknowledgement of partners' support.

There was evidence of an ordinal association between sponsorship level and the frequency of partner mentions by T4T ($p = 0.013$), consistent with H4. Figure 2 shows T4T's mentions of partners, again by star level, with partners who were not mentioned by T4T listed on the left of the figure. The width of the line indicates the number of tweets by T4T, relative to the most mentioned partner, Toys 'R' Us, mentioned 66 times by T4T.

Figure 3-2: T4T tweets mentioning partners

(Partners with no tweet mentions by T4T listed on left)



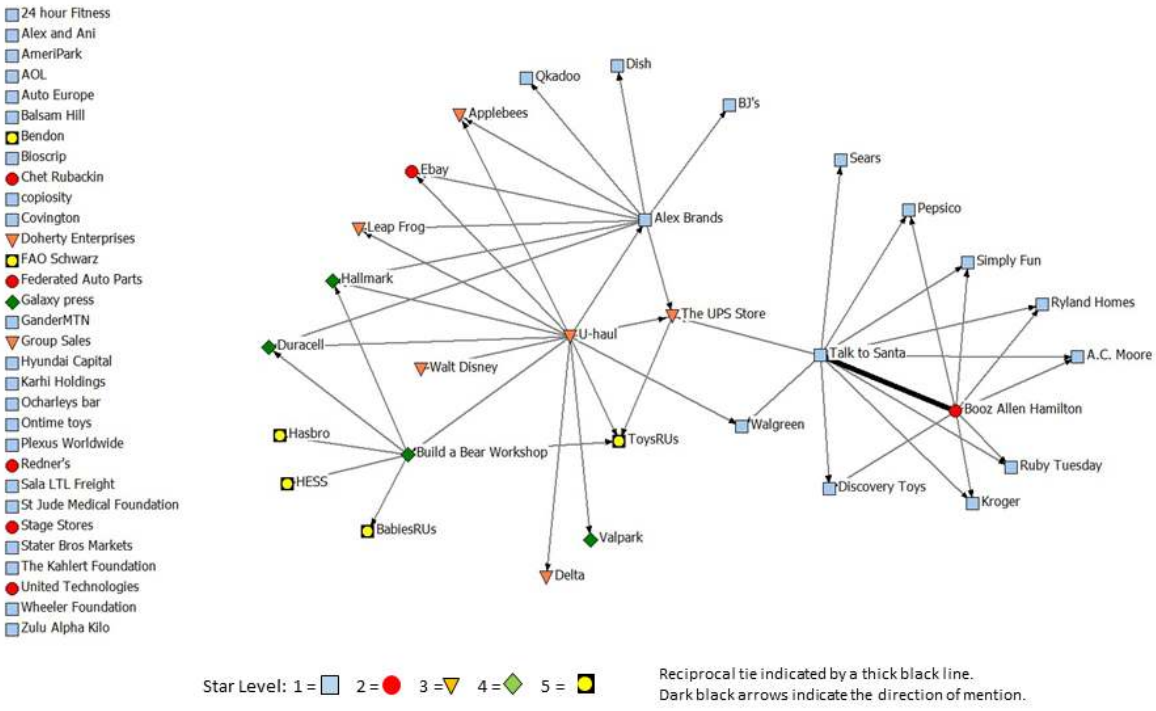
3.4.3 Inviting reciprocity: Publicising those who support the same cause

There was very little evidence of partners attempting to initiate reciprocal publicity by promoting other partners, as shown by Figure 3, which shows all partner mentions of other partners (with the direction of mention indicated by an arrow). The figure also shows the sole reciprocal mention (indicated by a thick black line). Partners that mentioned others were no more likely to be mentioned by other brands ($p > 0.1$), thus rejecting H5. Only seven brands mentioned other partners in tweets that also mentioned T4T (mentioning 27 other partners a total of 70 times, ranging from one to three mentions by any one partner of another). There was also almost no evidence of reciprocity: the most prolific mentioner (U-Haul, with 21

mentions of other partners) was not mentioned by any other partner, and there was only one partner dyad involving reciprocal mentions (between Booz Allen Hamilton and Talk to Santa). There was no evidence of partners co-creating tweets: that is, no partner retweeted one of the 452 partner tweets referring to T4T.

Figure 3-3: Tweets by partners mentioning other partners

(arrow heads show direction of mention)



3.5 Discussion

The study reveals the extent to which organisations promote their own CSR efforts and/or those of other partners in the CSR network using co-branded and co-created tweets. Similarly, the results show the extent to which the cause promotes its partners using the same techniques. This joint promotion of the cause and its partners represents an innovative way of

using Twitter to engage customers in brand-building by both a cause and its partners. However, one of the most surprising results from the study is the apparent failure of many partners to promote their brand's support of T4T, either on Twitter or through press coverage: many did not achieve publicity by either channel, and are clearly not using either channel to leverage their CSR efforts. This represents a missed opportunity to build consumers' evaluations of their brands as a result of their support for T4T. Such an approach may reflect what has been called a 'philanthropic stage' in non-profit and business sector collaboration, reflecting a level of engagement and resources which is relatively low, infrequent, simple and unstrategic (Austin, 2003).

As expected, there was an association, albeit weak, between the number of press reports mentioning a partner and T4T and the partner's own Twitter mentions of T4T (H1). Higher-level partners had, as expected, higher levels of press coverage (H2b) (albeit only marginally significant), but did not mention T4T significantly more on Twitter (H2a). The reason why higher level partners promote their activities more in the press than lower level partners, but do not show higher use of Twitter for the same purpose, is not clear. The result does suggest a lack of coordination in media management at these organisations, with press articles being associated with the level of corporate investment, but no comparable association with Twitter mentions. The result is particularly surprising because mentions of T4T in the partner's Twitter stream are under the control of the partner, while press mentions can be facilitated (e.g. through press releases), but are not directly controlled by the partner. The complete absence of Twitter promotion of donations to T4T by some partners, and the lack of higher promotion by higher level partners, does suggest, however, that many lack a clear strategy to promote their CSR efforts in the press and/or on Twitter – and thus fail to capture the full value of those efforts.

Examination of the brands that most frequently mentioned T4T in their tweets and vice versa suggested one explanation for which organisations were most likely to leverage their CSR efforts. Organisations that were selling toys, and/or offering collections depots (such as Toys 'R' Us and Walgreens) tended to mention T4T more frequently in their tweets, and also received the highest level of press reports, often in community service type announcements, reporting on collection locations. Other partners (such as parking company Valpark, a four-star partner) appeared to have no natural association with T4T, and did not appear to attempt to leverage their donation in any way, with neither Twitter nor press mentions of their support of T4T.

One of the factors influencing the success of corporate/non-profit collaborations is said to be the 'fit' between the product and cause (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004). The extent to which fit is perceived is said to be important for a company to realise benefits, and articulation of this fit via communication messages has been said to be crucial (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005). Among T4T partners, there were a number with obvious close fit with T4T – toy retailers, such as Toys 'R' Us, and child related charities, such as St Jude Medical Foundation. Others had less obvious product fit, such as Valpark, which as discussed above, did not mention their support of T4T in either tweets or press reports. The varying fit between different partners and T4T may therefore in part explain the low use of the press or Twitter to promote donations by partners with no natural fit with T4T. A previous experimental study found that high-fit sponsorships led to greater benefits for brand identity than low-fit sponsorships, but suggested that even low-fit sponsorships could 'create' fit by demonstrating fit between the sponsor and the cause (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). The strategy of U-Haul (a moving equipment and storage rental company) appeared to be consistent with that recommendation, with frequent media mentions of U-Haul trailers being

used to store donated toys, and U-Haul's repeated Twitter mentions of other partners. However, the fact that many partners (even some giving large donations) did not mention T4T in their tweets, or obtain media coverage of that donation, suggests that many brands are not attempting to articulate a fit and/or capitalise on potential benefits to their brand from their donation.

The results therefore show evidence of reciprocity between T4T and partners as expected, but the strength of the relationship was less than expected. There was an association between mentions of partners by T4T and vice versa (H3), and higher mentions of higher level partners (H4). There was, however, a much higher percentage of unmodified retweets in T4T's tweets (43%) compared to those by partners (20%), suggesting that many of T4T's partner mentions were mere reactions to partner tweets, without the additional creative input involved in tweet modification. It is not surprising that an NPO like T4T would have a more reactive Twitter strategy than its corporate partners; many NPOs face time, staff and monetary constraints on their use of social media (Briones et al., 2011). However, the evidence of T4T's apparent reactivity suggests an opportunity for partners to drive mentions by mentioning T4T, thus encouraging T4T to retweet a message, and thereby effectively endorse the partner message and brand. Conversely, the reactivity of T4T reinforces that the 11 partner organisations not on Twitter, and the 24 partners who did not mention T4T in their tweets, were missing an opportunity to promote their support, and to potentially have T4T endorse their brand messages by retweeting them. The results also show the potential for an NPO to offer a benefit to partners by favourable Twitter mentions, extending earlier research that showed that NPOs could effectively use another social media outlet, Facebook (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009).

The research found a surprisingly low number of partners (seven) mentioned other partner brands in tweets with reference to T4T. There was also almost no evidence of reciprocal promotion, rejecting H5: out of the total of 70 partner references to other partners, there was only one example of reciprocal promotion between partners (in two independent co-branded tweets) using mentions, and not a single example of co-creation between partners, in the form of a retweet. The T4T partner network thus appeared to be characterised by largely isolated two-way relationships with T4T, rather than a multi-partner network, apparently reflecting competition between partner brands, rather than coopetition.

This predominance of dyadic relationships between T4T and its partners is in contrast with the 'social' essence of social media, and its ability to provide a network. T4T's partners include at least 12 organisations for whom children's toys or services are likely to be a substantial part of revenue, so low partner mentions of other partners may be partly driven by reluctance to mention competitors. U-Haul, the partner who most frequently mentioned other partners (with 20 mentions of others) does not appear to compete with other partners, consistent with this explanation. However, the third highest mentioner was Alex Toys, which would compete with the other toy retailer partners. Conversely, three brands that are part of the same corporate umbrella – Toys 'R' Us, Babies 'R' Us, and FAO Schwartz – did not mention each other in their tweets. Competitive issues therefore do not fully explain the low number of mentions of other partners. In addition, the failure of so many partners to mention T4T in their tweets, and the low overall rate of mentions by those who did, suggest that the failure to mention other partners might be primarily driven, for most, by a lack of strategic use of Twitter to promote brands' CSR efforts. This suggests an unrealised opportunity for brands to use co-branded and co-created Twitter communications to increase customer

awareness of their CSR efforts by encouraging reciprocal promotion with the cause and with other partners – even competing ones.

Previous research has identified characteristics of tweets that are associated with higher levels of retweeting: for example, textual content (e.g., Araujo et al., 2015; Auger, 2014); hashtags (e.g., boyd et al., 2010; Suh et al., 2010) and interactivity (e.g., Burton & Soboleva, 2011; Li & Li, 2014). There have been mixed results on the effect of mentions on retweeting: Yang and Counts (2010) found that tweets containing mentions were more likely to be retweeted, but other authors have found that mentions decreased the number of retweets (Soboleva et al., 2015; Suh et al., 2010). This research did not directly examine the number of retweets of tweets; instead, it looked at whether tweets were retweeted by the organisations that presumably had most to benefit by retweeting – that is, whether T4T retweeted partner tweets and vice versa, and whether partners retweeted tweets by other partners. In these circumstances, mentioning other organisations within the T4T/partner network brings a tweet to the attention of other network partners, and thus encourages the mentioned party to retweet the tweet to its own partner network (which for some partners, amounted to many hundreds of thousands of followers). Within the T4T partner network, using mentions thus serves an important and strategic goal, and the relative lack of such mentions (and the failure of many network partners to retweet tweets which mentioned them positively) indicates a lack of strategic use of Twitter.

The paper also demonstrates the missed potential for reciprocal promotion between partners by retweeting each other's tweets. None of the partners engaged in such retweeting, and thus failed to leverage the benefits of their CSR efforts in support of T4T. The absence of reciprocal promotion by retweeting others' tweets is less surprising than T4T's failure to mention some supporting partners, because mentions of donors by non-profits creates

inclusion and develops relationships between the parties (Smitko, 2012). However, reciprocal promotion *between* partners would extend the strategic benefits of Twitter through the use of co-created communications. In the following section we discuss the implications of the results for further research.

3.6 Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

Overall, the study contributes to an understanding of social media use by NPOs and their brand partners, by assessing the use of social media by both the cause and its partners, and reciprocity within the network. The results are surprising, as they show that neither Twitter nor mainstream press were used as much as expected, raising the question of why so many partners do *not* use these channels to engage their networks by promoting their support of T4T. It is particularly surprising that T4T is clearly failing to use Twitter to recognise the contribution of many partners, reinforcing earlier findings that NPOs are failing to use the medium to its full capacity as a stakeholder-engagement vehicle (Lovejoy et al., 2012).

The research also showed lower than expected levels of reciprocity between the cause and its partners, again suggesting unrealised potential benefits for the NPO and its partner brands. While T4T is a not-for-profit organisation, presumably lacking social media expertise and constrained by time and staff, the limited recognition of partners by T4T on Twitter is of potential concern. The problem of a lack of balance in commitment between channel partners has previously been identified (Anderson & Weitz, 1992), and if parties believe that there is a lack of fairness (or reciprocity) in a relationship, they may transfer their commitment to other relationships (Farrelly & Quester, 2003). For T4T and other causes, demonstrating adequate recognition of partners is therefore of critical importance, and Twitter provides a cost-effective way to do this.

The almost complete lack of reciprocal promotion between partners (with only one dyad demonstrating reciprocal mentions) is also surprising, but perhaps less so. The concept of coopetition is relatively new, being first discussed in a journal article in 2000 (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). It is therefore not surprising, particularly given that many T4T partners did not appear to have a clear strategy to promote their CSR efforts, that only two organisations engaged in reciprocal promotion. Coopetition through co-branded and/or co-created communications on Twitter requires an effort to cooperate (for example by initially promoting another organisation), and a response – reciprocation of that promotion. One organisation, U-Haul, appeared to be attempting to obtain coopetition, with 21 mentions of other partners, but none of those organisations reciprocated, despite no obvious competitive conflict with U-Haul. The limited evidence of reciprocity therefore suggests that organisations have much to gain by becoming more innovative in their social media efforts. Co-created promotion is particularly important because it has the potential to expand an organisation's promotion of its CSR efforts to a new audience – that of a network partner. Further research would be useful to understand why many T4T partners did not appear to attempt to publicise their own activities, or engage in co-branded or co-created communications in the form of retweeting other partners' messages. For T4T to mention partner organisations would be expected to be a basic demonstration of reciprocity, and for partners to promote their own CSR efforts by mentioning T4T would be a basic attempt to leverage their CSR investment. However, the research demonstrated surprisingly low levels of both activities, and still lower levels of cooperative promotion between partners. The study thus identifies an important area for future research – the use of mentions as a strategic device for reciprocal promotion within a cause/partner network.

As this study focused on only one NPO, it is possible that the findings are unique to this organisation. Further research could therefore examine multiple organisations and other causes, and reciprocity in mentions on other social media, to see if they reveal more use of social media to provide reciprocal benefits within a network of brands. Certainly, this study shows that there is untapped potential for innovative use of Twitter to achieve mutual benefits within a network of brands.

4: TWEETS FOR TOTS: USING TWITTER TO PROMOTE A CHARITY AND ITS SUPPORTERS

4.1 Overview of Paper

This chapter presents a study describing the Twitter communications of a non-profit organisation (NPO) that refer to its corporate partners over two Christmas periods. The study extends the analysis described in Chapter 3 by obtaining comparable tweet data posted by the NPO (Toys for Tots (T4T)) in the same period of the subsequent year. Through the analysis of two time periods, the research examines the evolution of T4T's practice in regard to proactive and positive mentioning of its partners through the use of Twitter mentions and retweets. The study of the evolution of Twitter practice provides useful insight with respect to planning marketing communications and measuring performance on this social platform. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to assess the NPO's approach. Quantitative examination revealed a marked decrease in the total number of tweets and in the number of retweets of partner tweets posted by T4T across the two periods. The findings also showed a disproportionately large decrease in the number of tweets mentioning partners, and a decreasing association between the amount of financial support provided by partners (their 'star' level) and the frequency of mentions. Content analysis was also used to assess the type of tweets that were retweeted by the NPO, revealing five categories of retweets. The most common form of retweets that T4T posted in Period 1 was of 'a general partner promotion', unrelated to T4T. In Period 2, however the total number of retweets of partner tweets decreased markedly (from 107 to 14, or by 86.9%), with the most common type of retweets by T4T related to its own activity.

The findings highlight the need for T4T and other similar NPOs to use Twitter to successfully nurture their partnerships with donors. The findings accomplish the objective of the thesis to analyse Twitter communications within the network of an organisation and its partners and another objective of the thesis to assist both the academic community and marketing practitioners in developing sound social media strategies. Consequently, the main implication of the study is that T4T and other NPOs need to repeatedly acknowledge the support of their partners in multiple marketing channels to increase salience of their message through strategic repetition. The other key contribution is a discussion of Twitter strategies that NPOs could use to add value for their partners.

As the first author, I put forward the idea for the analysis and obtained and organised the data for subsequent statistical and content analysis, with advice being provided by my principal supervisor, who is the second author of this study, and suggestions from other co-authors. In addition, I worked on sourcing the literature on social media use and wrote the first draft of the paper, - with subsequent revisions by the other authors. I finalised the first submission, led the response to the reviewers, and finalised the final submission.

The paper has been published at the Journal of Consumer Marketing[8]. Consistent with the other studies presented in the thesis, the paper has been slightly modified in order to maintain a uniform thesis style, with all references contained in the reference list at the end of the thesis.

[8] Soboleva, A., Burton, S., Daellenbach, K., & Basil, D., Z. (2017). Tweets for tots: Using Twitter to promote a charity and its supporters. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 34(6), 515-523.

Tweets for Tots: Using Twitter to Promote a Charity and its Supporters

Abstract

Purpose: Twitter provides an ideal channel for a non-profit organisation (NPO) to add value to its corporate partners by tweeting to its own network of followers. This research examines the extent to which one NPO used Twitter for this purpose, and discusses the implications.

Design/methodology/approach: The research examined tweets sent by a large US-based charitable organisation (Toys for Tots ('T4T')) across two Christmas periods. All tweets that mentioned or retweeted T4T's corporate partners were analysed.

Findings: The findings show surprisingly limited mentions of partners by T4T, with many never mentioned, and markedly fewer mentions of partners in the second period. Separate analysis of partner tweets retweeted by T4T revealed that none were modified to add value for T4T and/or for the partner, and many were unrelated to T4T, raising a risk of alienating T4T's followers.

Research limitations/implications: Only one NPO was examined, and the study focused on Twitter, with limited analysis of T4T's Facebook posts. However, the relatively low, decreasing and largely indirect promotion of partners in T4T's tweets suggest a lack of strategic use of Twitter by T4T.

Practical implications: Coupled with other research, the results show the need for this and other NPOs to more effectively use Twitter to reinforce partnerships with corporate partners.

Originality/value: The results demonstrate the failure of a major US charity to use Twitter to add value for its corporate partners. Even in the unlikely event that this NPO is an isolated

case, the results show the need for NPOs and their corporate partners to work together to provide reciprocal benefits.

Keywords: Twitter, retweet, social media, reciprocity

4.2 Introduction/Background

Like all companies, non-profit organisations (NPOs) benefit from developing positive relationships with their stakeholders. However, unlike for-profits, NPOs typically generate revenue from donations and other forms of financial support from individuals, governments, foundations and corporations. Corporate giving to NPOs reached $18.45 billion in 2015 (Giving USA, 2016). This high level of corporate support suggests that as well as delivering benefit to society by contributing to their focal social cause, a vital activity for NPOs is cultivating, managing and sustaining corporate partnerships. An essential part of this activity is delivering the benefits desired by corporate partners.

Within this environment, social media (for example Facebook or Twitter) have potential for NPOs to deliver benefits to their corporate partners. Certainly, social media have become powerful and necessary tools for marketers, with opportunities for brands to connect with consumers in potentially more meaningful and active ways (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). For NPOs, social media provide a method for marketers to promote a cause and engage with their stakeholders, including their corporate supporters (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Meenaghan, 2013). Social media are an especially attractive channel for non-profit marketers because the reach of communications is not only a function of the amount spent, as typically occurs with paid advertising, but also a function of online sharing, which often occurs organically at no cost (Kanter & Fine, 2010). Social media's low barriers to entry and low cost per message therefore offer particular advantages for NPOs, which are usually constrained by a limited marketing budget (Bloom & Novelli, 1981). Social media could therefore offer a cost-effective channel for such NPOs to promote their cause, and also to deliver benefit to corporate partners. This paper examines how a major US-based, non-profit organisation, Marine Toys for Tots Foundation (known as Toys for Tots, henceforward

'T4T'), uses the social media channel, Twitter, to promote its corporate partners. Additionally, the paper considers how NPOs could more effectively use this channel to benefit their corporate partners and thus further benefit themselves in the long run.

4.2.1 NPO Partnerships

Partnerships between NPOs and companies that support them (henceforth 'partners' or 'corporate partners') have been classified in a variety of ways. Austin and Seitanidi's (2012) collaboration continuum proposes four levels of partnership, ranging from the basic philanthropic level, representing low engagement, to a transformational relationship, with high engagement and a high level of interdependence. Those authors propose that while the philanthropic level may create value for one of the partners, opportunity exists at the higher levels where 'conjoined' activities co-create value for both parties. At these higher levels of collaboration, resources flow in a bilateral manner, and reciprocal exchange (such as reciprocal promotion on social media) can create value.

At the very least, partners can contribute to an NPO's revenue, but they may also help improve public awareness of its issues and increase its influence (Runté, Basil, & Deshpande, 2009). In supporting NPOs, companies satisfy consumer expectations of social responsibility (Berger et al., 2004). In return, partners typically expect a benefit for one or more stakeholder groups, such as customers, media, internal staff, suppliers, distributors, rights holders or shareholders (Meenaghan, 2013). Where investment by corporate partners is high, relationships appear to attract greater resources and attention (from an NPO), relative to relationships where investment is low (Simpson, Lefroy, & Tsarenko, 2011). This further supports the view that a partner is likely to expect reciprocal benefits from the NPO in return for its support.

The benefit to a partner is clearly best manifested, however, when the relationship is communicated, sometimes referred to as 'CSR Communication' (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). To the extent that NPO alliances benefit the corporate partner, it behooves the partner to communicate their NPO support. This view is consistent with discussions highlighting the need for corporate partners to leverage their partnership via other activities/communications, thus emphasising the congruence of fit between the two parties (e.g., Fleck & Quester, 2007; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004; Simpson et al., 2011). However, research suggests that consumers may be skeptical of CSR Communications (Nickell et al., 2011), and the promotion of NPO/company alliances is more positively received when communicated by the NPO rather than by the company (Du et al., 2010). Since NPOs benefit from these relationships, they therefore have incentive to nurture them by taking actions that benefit their partners. Thus, both corporate partners and NPOs benefit when the NPO communicates about the alliance in a proactive and positive manner.

4.2.2 Using Social Media to Enhance Partner Benefits

This study focuses on Twitter, which in the second half of 2016 reported 313 million monthly active users across the globe (Twitter, 2016). Early research has highlighted interactive capabilities of Twitter that can be used to communicate with stakeholders (Burton & Soboleva, 2011). Twitter would seem to have particular potential for NPOs because the NPO can promote a partner in a number of ways: at the simplest level, the NPO can spread a partner's messages by retweeting them to the NPO's followers, or 'mention' one or more of its partners' brands in a tweet by referencing the Twitter handle (@username) of the partner or its brands. The NPO's mention serves to promote and endorse the partner organisation by associating the partner brand with the NPO, which can help to raise the partner's visibility

with the NPO's followers (Neiger et al., 2013), while also potentially benefiting the reputation of the NPO by associating it with the partner. Thus, both the partner and the NPO can use Twitter to obtain reciprocal benefits in a win-win strategy.

Despite the theoretical attractiveness of social media for non-profits, there is evidence that NPOs have been slower and less efficient than their for-profit counterparts to adopt social media channels (Burton et al., 2013; Gálvez-Rodríguez, Caba-Pérez, & López-Godoy, 2016). In their analysis of 73 USA NPOs, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) concluded that while NPOs were using Twitter, they were not using it to its fullest, most strategic extent. Similarly, other research has found that NPOs use Twitter predominantly for one-way communication to disseminate information, possibly due to limited resources and lack of social media expertise (Svensson, Mahoney, & Hambrick, 2015). Notably, the above studies looked at tweets by NPOs, but there is only very limited research examining the use of Twitter by NPOs to promote (either directly or indirectly) their donors and corporate partners (Burton et al., 2017; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2016). This suggests two main avenues of interest. Firstly, from the preceding discussion, there are benefits for both NPOs and corporate partners if their partnerships are communicated on social media, but are such partnerships being communicated on Twitter, and if so, how? Secondly, in the context of Twitter and corporate partnerships, both 'mentions' and 'retweets' allow acknowledgment and/or promotion of the other party, encouraging reciprocal promotion by the mentioned/retweeted party. Since reciprocal benefits are desired both by partners and the NPO, and such opportunity exists on Twitter, is there evidence of reciprocal promotion between partners and the NPO on Twitter?

This paper therefore extends the limited research on how NPOs use Twitter to assist and potentially co-create value with their corporate partners. Specifically, the study explores

how a large NPO, Toys for Tots uses Twitter to provide benefits for its corporate partners by either mentioning them in tweets (in either original tweets or replies), or by endorsing partner messages by retweeting them to the NPO's network of followers. The study examines the use of Twitter over a 15-month period by T4T to promote its network of corporate partners. Previous research has examined the frequency of reciprocal mentions between T4T and its partners over one Christmas season (Burton et al., 2017), but in this paper we go further, by assessing changes in partner mentions by T4T over two Christmas seasons, and by using content analysis to examine the different categories of partner tweets that are forwarded (or 'retweeted') by T4T. In the following sections, we: (1) use quantitative analysis to assess how frequently the NPO a) mentions partners in its tweets, b) mentions partners in replies and/or c) retweets partner tweets (with or without modification), and (2) use qualitative analysis to examine which types of partner tweets are retweeted by T4T. Finally, we discuss implications for NPOs attempting to use social media to promote their cause and/or support their partners.

4.3 Method

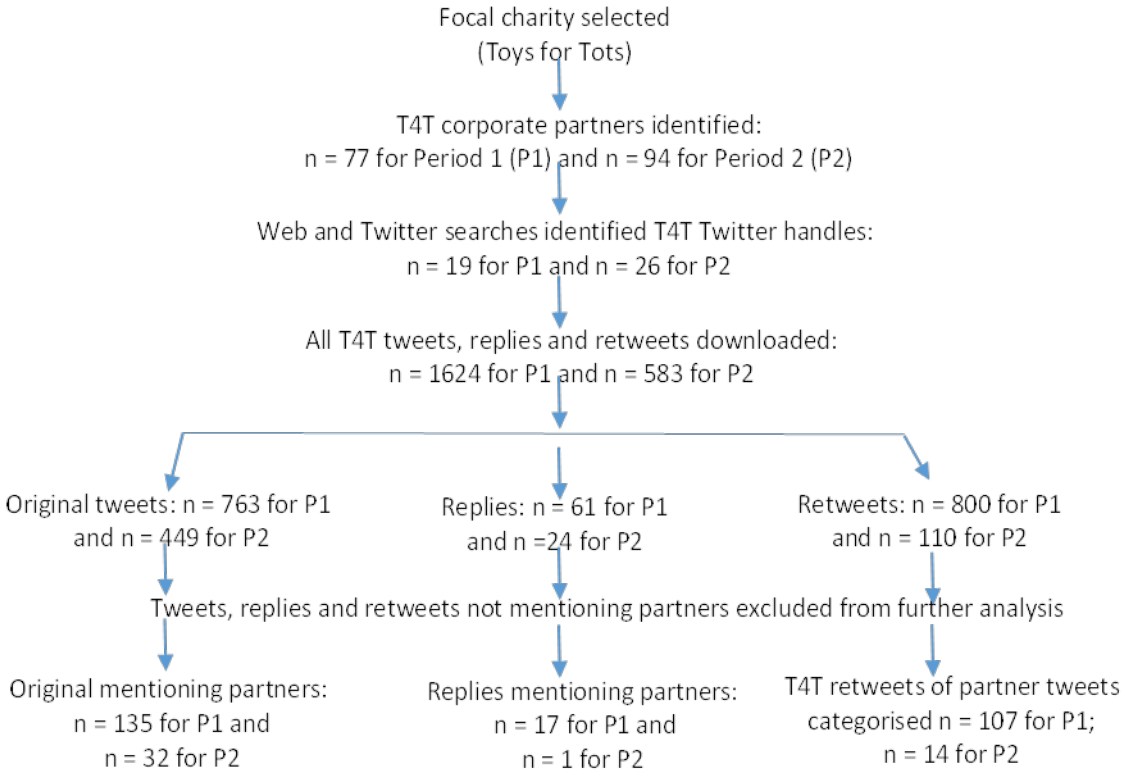
Toys for Tots is a charity that works 'to deliver, through a new toy at Christmas, a message of hope to less fortunate youngsters that will assist them into becoming responsible, productive, patriotic citizens' (Toys for Tots Foundation, 2017). T4T has been ranked as one of the top 400 charities in the US by 'Philanthropy 400' in 2011 (Toys for Tots, 2015b). In 2015 T4T reported revenue from corporations of $11.5 million, not including toy donations or services given (Toys for Tots, 2015c). In addition, many toys and in-kind services are donated to T4T, with partners such as Toys'R'Us and Walgreens offering locations at which individuals can leave toys for T4T, UPS and ZipCar offering delivery services, and other partners giving toys and/or donations to T4T.

For the 2015 Christmas season, T4T had 77 corporate supporters, including 61 'Corporate Partners', ranging from 5-star (giving $US1 million in cash or $2 million in toys) to 1-star partners (giving $US25K in cash or $100K in toys) and 16 'National Corporate Donors' who help raise up to $24,999 in cash or up to $99,999 worth of toys (Toys for Tots, 2015a). One year later, there were 94 corporate supporters, including 79 Corporate Partners and 15 National Corporate Donors (Toys for Tots, 2016). For clarity of presentation, in subsequent discussion we refer to both groups as 'corporate partners' or 'partners' and refer to National Corporate Donors as 'zero-star' partners. The increase in partner numbers, however, conceals considerable turnover in partners: from Period 1 to Period 2, considering only the higher value star partners (i.e., ignoring zero-star partners), T4T lost 22 out of 61 partners, or 36% of its Period 1 partners.

US-based T4T Twitter accounts were first identified for the first Christmas season, from November 1, 2014 to January 15, 2015 (henceforth 'Period 1'), using web and Twitter searches, resulting in a total of 19 active T4T Twitter handles, and 26 one year later (at the start of Period 2). These accounts had an average of 727.6 followers (SD = 1,384) in Period 1 and 567.7 followers (SD=1,260) in Period 2. Archival data in the form of all tweets from these handles for the two periods were downloaded using the Twitonomy premium service for what was assumed to be T4T's peak period of activity, from Thanksgiving till early in the New Year. This process resulted in 1,624 tweets for Period 1, and 583 tweets for the equivalent time one year later, in Period 2. Downloaded tweets were one of three types: original, replies or retweets, as defined by Twitter's own field scheme (Twitter, 2017b). Excel search functions were then used to identify tweets or retweets mentioning one or more T4T partners, either as a Twitter mention (that is by referring to a partner's Twitter @username handle), or by using a partner's name, without referencing their Twitter handle.

Retweets sent by T4T were also analysed separately to identify those that were retweets of tweets by partners. Tweets, replies and retweets that did not mention a partner were excluded from further analysis. Figure 1 presents a flow chart of each step used in the method. The association between the star level of the partner and the frequency of mentions by T4T was tested using the Mood median test (a non- parametric analysis to allow for skewness in the data).

Figure 4-1: Flow chart of analysis



The content of T4T's retweets of partners' tweets was coded manually to identify different types of messages contained in the retweeted texts and/or images. Two coders initially reviewed the Period 1 data, and identified five categories of retweeted messages: (a) partner price promotion tweets (such as a tweet offering coupons or discounts); (b) general partner promotions (i.e., not including price promotions) without any reference to T4T; (c)

partner tweets promoting T4T without reference to the partner's own activity; (d) T4T related promotions, but also referring to the partner's activity (such as an offer to donate to T4T for particular purchases); and (e) seasonal messages referring to the Christmas or Thanksgiving period. Two other coders then separately classified all retweeted messages into these five categories, without identifying any additional categories. This process resulted in 88.8% agreement. The inconsistencies were resolved by clarifying definitions of categories and where appropriate, accessing the content of embedded links in tweets, resulting in 100% agreement. Period 2 retweets were coded using the Period 1 coding scheme without any new categories of retweets being identified, with the exception of the seasonal messages category being expanded to include one reference to Hanukkah.

4.4 Results

Descriptive statistics for the two time periods are given in Table 1. The first notable result from Table 1 is that despite an increased number of active T4T handles in Period 2 (26), compared with 19 in Period 1, there was a marked decrease in the total number of tweets posted by T4T across the two periods (from 1,624 to 583, a 64.1% decrease). While this lower level of activity would be expected to result in fewer tweets by T4T mentioning partners, there was a disproportionately large decrease in the number of tweets mentioning partners, which fell by 79.5%, from 259 to 53 tweets. This decrease is particularly surprising because the number of partners increased, from 77 in Period 1 to 94 in Period 2. As well as the sharp decrease in the number of partners mentioned, there was a decrease in the number of T4T reply tweets that included a partner mention, which fell from 17 to 1 (94.1%). There was also a sharp decrease in the percentage of partners mentioned: in Period 1, only 51.9%

(or 40 out of 77) of T4T's partners were mentioned in any T4T tweets, but in Period 2 this percentage had fallen sharply, with only 14.9% (14 out of 94) mentioned.

Perhaps even more surprising than the low and decreasing rate of partner mentions was the limited and decreasing association between partner star level and frequency of mentions. While in Period 1 there was a significant association between the star level of the partner and the median number of mentions of the partner by T4T (Chi-square = 21.5, $p < 0.001$), there was no association for Period 2 (Chi-square 8.78, $p = 0.12$). In addition, despite the significant association in Period 1, during that period one of T4T's six 5-star partners and two of its eight 3-star partners were not mentioned or retweeted at all by T4T. By Period 2, the rate of mentions and retweets of the higher-level partners had dropped further, with three out of each of the five 4- and five 5-star partners, and seven out of the ten 3-star partners, never mentioned.

As with other measures of T4T's Twitter activity, the total number of retweets by T4T decreased markedly (from 800 to 110, or by 86.3%). As a percentage of the total retweets, the retweets of partners' tweets stayed roughly the same (falling only slightly from 13.4% to 12.7%). However, commensurate with the large decrease in total retweets, the number of retweets of partner tweets decreased from 107 to 14, or by 86.9%. In Period 1, those 107 retweets represented tweets by 19 partners, but in Period 2, the 14 retweets represented only 7 partners (data not shown in Table 1). T4T thus only retweeted tweets by a minority of partners (24.7% in Period 1 and 7.4% in Period 2).

Table 4-1: Descriptive statistics for tweets

Measure	Period 1		Period 2		Percentage change from Period 1
No. of partners	77		94		22.1%
No. of active T4T Twitter handles	19		26		36.8%
Total tweets examined	1624		583		-64.1%
Tweet type	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	
Original tweets (including replies)	763	47.0%	449	77.0%	-41.2%
Replies	61	3.8%	24	4.1%	-60.7%
Retweets	800	49.3%	110	18.9%	-86.3%
Partner mentions	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	
Original tweets mentioning partners	135	17.7%	32	7.1%	-76.3%
Replies mentioning partners	17	27.9%	1	4.2%	-94.1%
Retweets of partner tweets	107	13.4%	14	12.7%	-86.9%
Total tweets mentioning partners	259	15.9%	53	9.1%	-79.5%
No. and % of partners mentioned and/or retweeted (out of 77 in Period 1 and 94 in Period 2)	40	51.9%	14	14.9%	-65.0%

Given the unexpected decrease in T4T's Twitter activity, T4T's Facebook activity was analysed for the same periods and a simple count of the number of Facebook posts made by T4T was recorded. The results did not suggest that Facebook became a substitute social media platform for T4T during Period 2: in Period 1, T4T made 59 posts on their Facebook page, but by Period 2, this had dropped to 29 posts, a 50.9% decrease. Thus, there is no evidence that the decrease in Twitter activity by T4T was caused by Facebook becoming the primary social media platform for T4T.

In the final part of the analysis, the partner tweets retweeted by T4T were examined using content analysis to investigate the types of partner tweets that T4T retweeted, thus implicitly endorsing those tweets to its own network of followers. The first key finding from this part of the analysis was that there were *no* modified (or 'quote tweet') retweets: that is, all retweets by T4T consisted of tweets that were forwarded by T4T without additional comment. These T4T retweets thus implicitly endorsed the partners' tweets by retweeting them, but did not explicitly endorse or acknowledge the support of the partner, which would have presumably increased the benefit of the retweet to the partner.

The results of the content analysis are shown in Table 2. Figure 2 shows an example of the most common form of retweet in Period 1, a general partner promotion unrelated to T4T – here, a retweet of a Toys'R'Us tweet promoting its dress-up range. This category was the second most common in Period 2. Figure 3 shows an example of the second most common form of retweet in Period 1 – Promotion of T4T (which was the most common category in Period 2), in this case, a Walgreens tweet encouraging donations to T4T at Walgreens. While focused on T4T, this tweet has the additional benefit of encouraging visits to Walgreens, to drop off toy donations, and also potentially make purchases.

Table 4-2: Categories of partner retweets by T4T

Category	Period 1		Period 2		Percentage change from Period 1
	n	%	n	%	
General partner promotion	40	37.4%	4	28.6%	-90.0%
Promotion of T4T	28	26.2%	5	35.7%	-82.1%
T4T related promotion	17	15.9%	3	7.1%	-82.4%
Partner price promotion	15	14.0%	1	21.4%	-93.3%
Seasonal messages	7	6.5%	1	7.1%	-85.7%
Total	107	100%	14	100%	n/a

Figure 4-2: Toys'R'Us promotion, retweeted by T4T

Figure 4-3: Walgreens' tweet driving action to benefit T4T

The third most common category of retweet in both periods was tweets promoting a partner's support of T4T in some form of cause-related marketing arrangement, often by promising a donation to T4T for each purchase of a product, as shown in Figure 4. This tweet, by Duracell (in Period 1), promotes the company's donation to T4T for each purchase of specified batteries, supported by an image of popular media personality Ellen DeGeneres, flanked by two US military (because T4T is run by the United States Marine Corps Reserve). Another example of a cause-related marketing tweet is shown in Figure 5, a tweet where Toys'R'Us invites Twitter users to follow its Snapchat social media account covering its partnership with the celebrity former basketballer Shaquille O'Neal ('Shaq') to support Toys for Tots - a marketing tactic to gain more followers in a new social media channel (Johnson, 2015).

Figure 4-4: Duracell tweet, retweeted by T4T

Figure 4-5: Toys'R'Us tweet, retweeted by T4T

Figures 6 and 7 show two examples of tweets coded 'Partner price promotion' that were retweeted by T4T. In these cases, T4T simply retweeted price promotions by partners, in every case without any modification to show the relevance of the tweet for T4T. While T4T retweeting such promotional messages provides an obvious benefit to its partners by extending the reach of the messages to T4T's own followers, the lack of an obvious link between T4T and what could be seen as advertising messages risks alienating T4T's own followers – as well as giving up the opportunity to enhance the message, and justify retweeting, by retweeting a modified form of the tweet.

Figure 4-6: Alex and Ani tweet, retweeted by T4T

Figure 4-7: Walgreens' tweet, retweeted by T4T

4.5 Discussion

This study sought to explore how one large US NPO (T4T) uses Twitter to add value to its corporate partners, and by extension, to consider how other NPOs could more effectively use this channel. However, the results show what appears to be a lack of strategic use of Twitter by T4T. Relatively few of T4T's tweets mentioned partners, and many partners were never mentioned, including some of the most valuable 4- and 5-star partners. Although T4T sometimes retweeted partner tweets, those retweets were invariably unmodified, thus forgoing the opportunity to provide value to the partner by adding relevant content to the retweet. Instead, T4T often forwarded partner tweets without any obvious link to T4T, potentially alienating some followers by forwarding what could be seen as advertising messages unrelated to T4T.

Many organisations, particularly NPOs, are still developing their expertise in social media such as Twitter (e.g., Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2016; Svensson et al., 2015). However,

the decreasing use of Twitter by T4T over the 15-month period, and the sharp decrease in mentions of partners, suggests that T4T's lack of strategic use of Twitter is not explained by the organisation learning to use Twitter; instead, the data reveal progressively less strategic use of Twitter by T4T over the two Christmas periods.

The reasons underlying T4T's lack of strategic use of Twitter, and in particular, its decreasing mentions of, and retweets of, partners are not clear. The results suggest, however, that T4T does not have adequate social media resources or does not place high strategic importance on using Twitter to maintain and reinforce relationships with partners - for example, by positively mentioning those partners, and/or retweeting their content, where appropriate, with modification. T4T thereby gives up the opportunity to favourably influence the attitudes and/or behaviours of potential customers of those partners, and thus cannot maximise value for its partners.

As suggested above, T4T's failure to use Twitter strategically may also reflect a lack of resources and/or expertise, as shown by its failure to modify any partner retweets when, as discussed above, modification could add value for the partner and shows the relevance of the retweet for T4T. Certainly, a recent study has highlighted the importance of well-trained personnel to align an NPO's social objectives with their communication activities on Twitter (Anagnostopoulos, Gillooly, Cook, Parganas, & Chadwick, 2016). Any lack of expertise at T4T may arise in part from its decentralised structure, as indicated by its multiple Twitter accounts across the US (19 and 26 in Period 1 and Period 2 respectively). Regional T4T groups, and their associated Twitter handles, may be focused on local objectives, such as the need to encourage, collect and distribute donated toys. However, a review of the T4T handles that sent tweets mentioning partners showed that the handle listed on T4T's website, @ToysForTots_USA (presumably the central handle), sent only a minority of the tweets

mentioning partners (25.8% or 67 out of 259 in Period 1 and 24.5% or 13 out of 53 in Period 2). Those 13 partner mentions by the central handle in Period 2 mentioned only seven partners, including only two 5-star partners (mentioned a total of eight times), one 4-star, one 3-star, one 2-star and two zero-star partners. Given this failure by even the highest profile T4T Twitter handle to mention the vast majority of partners (87 out of 94, or 92.5%), T4T's lack of strategic use of Twitter cannot be explained by regional T4T handles focusing on local goals. Instead, T4T's failure to use Twitter to acknowledge, thank and/or reinforce the contribution of many of its corporate partners may reflect a lack of recognition of the need for reciprocity towards its corporate partners, and a lack of understanding of the value of Twitter for achieving that reciprocity.

So what are the implications of these results for T4T and for other NPOs that rely heavily on contributions from corporate partners? As discussed in the literature review, partners typically expect a benefit for one or more stakeholder groups in return for their support (Meenaghan, 2013) and the promotion of NPO/company alliances is more positively received when communicated by the NPO rather than by the company (Du et al., 2010). So the most fundamental implication is that T4T and other NPOs need to acknowledge the support of their partners - and if the NPO is using multiple channels to communicate with consumers, that acknowledgement should be made in every such channel, and ideally at regular intervals, consistent with the principle of reminder advertising to maintain salience of a message (Armstrong, 2010). Acknowledgment of partners could be as simple as one of the few tweets posted by T4T recognizing the support of a partner - here, Delta (a 3-star partner):

Thank you @Delta for supporting @AtlToysforTots with $25,000. The children in Atlanta will be very happy! https://t.co/lsUA19TVxX

By publicly thanking a partner in tweets, the connection between the partner's brand and the NPO is reinforced. This form of communication could serve to encourage and support many of the objectives corporate partners seek, such as enhancing legitimacy and reputation (Gray & Stites, 2013).

As well as, or in addition to providing reputational benefits to a partner, as in the tweet above, T4T could directly add value for its partners by encouraging consumers to patronise those partners. An example of this approach is shown in another T4T tweet encouraging followers to visit Toys'R'Us and promoting Toys'R'Us' '#PlayItForward' hashtag, which encourages consumers, *inter alia*, to donate to T4T:

#PlayItForward and help a child in need this season by visiting @ToysRUs and donating a new, unwrapped toy. https://t.co/OsBS8mNNC9

T4T and other NPOs can also add value to their partners by retweeting their tweets, thus increasing the reach of those tweets. Retweeting has been shown to result in recipients having enhanced norms concerning the sender, more favourable attitudes toward the behaviour advocated by the sender, and greater intention to adopt the behaviour (Lim & Lee-Won, 2016). However, the effect of retweeting is likely to be substantially increased if the NPO modifies the tweet to increase its relevance to its audience. Although tweets are limited to 140 characters, the characters in a retweeted tweet do not count towards the character limit in a 'quote tweet' (formerly called a 'modified tweet'). So, instead of merely retweeting partners' tweets, such as the Walgreens promotional tweet shown in Figure 7, T4T could have retweeted the tweet with additional text such as:

'Grab a bargain at Walgreens, one of our partners. It's a great time to buy from them, and perhaps pick up something for T4T!'

None of the strategies discussed above require sophisticated skills in social media management. If implemented, they would add value for T4T's partners and presumably increase the likelihood that those partners will engage in an ongoing partnership with T4T, consistent with the principles of effective partnerships between non-profits and businesses (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). Conversely, the limited acknowledgment and reinforcement of the support of partners raises the possibility that partners will not maintain an ongoing relationship with T4T. This limited recognition by T4T of its partners may explain the high partner turnover observed: as discussed earlier, by Period 2, T4T had lost 36% (or 22 out of 61) of its 1- to 5-star partners from Period 1. While those partners may have decided to stop supporting T4T for a variety of reasons, any perception of a lack of a concrete benefit from their donations to T4T would be likely to have contributed to their decision to leave. So T4T and other NPOs should attempt to ensure that there is a match between their strategic objectives and their social media communication strategies, and, if appropriate, provide training and support for the social media marketing team, to ensure that the social media strategy is consistent with the NPO's objectives relative to partners.

The results also have implications for corporate partners. While some corporations may be prepared to make donations for purely philanthropic reasons without expectations of a return (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012), partners typically expect a benefit from supporting an NPO (Meenaghan, 2013). While NPOs should ideally be proactive in providing that benefit, if, as shown by the case of T4T, the NPO fails to add value for the partner, the partner could potentially work with the NPO to show how mutual value can be achieved. So, with Twitter, the partner could encourage the NPO to publicly acknowledge partners and add value, where appropriate by replying to, mentioning and/or retweeting partner tweets.

The study also has implications for future research. As the study considered only one NPO, further research is warranted with multiple cases to gain a stronger sense for similarities and differences in these findings across causes and/or countries. As discussed in the introduction, in a 2012 study, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) concluded that while NPOs were using Twitter, they were not using it to its fullest, most strategic extent. Five years later, these results present an even more pessimistic picture of Twitter use by a prominent US charity. Of even more concern, T4T's performance became less, not more, strategic over the 15-month period. The limited use of Twitter by T4T is consistent with, but even more concerning than, previous studies which have found that other NPOs were not using Twitter to its fullest, interactive and strategic extent (e.g., Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2016; Inauen & Schoeneborn, 2014; Lovejoy et al., 2012). However, none of those studies identified or discussed NPOs using Twitter to reinforce the contribution of their corporate partners. Given the importance of corporate partners for NPOs, further research is needed to investigate whether the apparent failure of NPOs to use Twitter to build their relationships with corporate partners reflects lack of recognition of the importance of social media in general, or Twitter alone, or lack of skills in social media strategy formulation and/or execution.

T4T is different from many charities in having a strongly seasonal focus. That is, its activity is heavily focused around a two-month period leading up to Christmas. While a seasonal focus is not unique to T4T, under such circumstances it will be more difficult to attract and retain skilled staff, maintain a consistent strategy and retain an engaged online audience during low-activity periods. Further research could therefore investigate whether NPOs (or indeed, seasonal for-profit organisations) find it more difficult to engage effectively with their stakeholders on Twitter and other social media platforms.

Finally, further research could explore the perceptions of, and responses of, corporate partners to varying social media strategies by the NPOs they support. In particular, it would be worthwhile to investigate the views of corporations that stop supporting an NPO, such as the partners who sponsored T4T in Period 1 but not in Period 2.

Although the study identifies areas for further research it has two obvious limitations, in focusing on only one NPO and one social media platform. The limitation of focusing on only one NPO is in part balanced by the benefit of examining its Twitter activity over a 15-month period, allowing changes in its activity to be assessed. The focus on Twitter also limits the scope of the study, but the parallel decrease in T4T's activity on both Twitter and Facebook suggests that the primary focus of the study on Twitter is not confounded by T4T having a social media strategy focused on other social media platforms.

The study also assumed that T4T mentions of partners and/or retweeting of partner tweets will be beneficial for T4T and/or its partners. Further research could investigate the benefit of such practices by examining whether partners see these practices as adding value for them, and/or if they result in wider dissemination of T4T messages by consumers, as measured by retweet rates and/or enhanced consumer attitudes to T4T and/or its partners.

4.6 Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest there is significant opportunity for NPOs with a social cause to better engage in social media. While Twitter restricts users to 140 characters (though for quote tweets, 140 characters in addition to the quoted tweet), much may be accomplished within this restriction. At a minimum, NPOs can provide greater benefits to their partners by simply acknowledging their involvement on Twitter and thus potentially enhance the

attitudes of consumers towards those partners. But as discussed above, mentioning partners and strategic retweeting of their tweets can add value much more directly. However, these results show that despite partnering with some of the US' leading brands, T4T has apparently failed to use Twitter strategically over two key activity periods. It is unlikely that T4T is an isolated case in its lack of strategic use of Twitter. For marketing researchers and academics, there is clearly a pressing need to understand why such a well-connected NPO does not demonstrate more strategic social media performance. By developing enhanced models explaining the factors that drive effective social media strategies, researchers and academics can assist organisations like T4T to improve their digital marketing strategies and performance. It is possible to achieve reciprocal benefits for NPOs and their partners, and invite audiences of both parties to engage in a social media conversation – even if it is limited to 140 characters.

5: 'RETWEET FOR A CHANCE TO…': AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT TRIGGERS CONSUMERS TO ENGAGE IN SEEDED EWOM ON TWITTER

5.1 Overview of Paper

This chapter reports on a study that uses tweet data from 32 global brands on Interbrand's Best Global Brands list (Interbrand, 2013) to analyse what predicts dissemination of organisational messages on Twitter. The research builds on the framework for examining different tweet features proposed in the study contained in Chapter 2. Specifically, the study develops and tests a theoretical model of tweet features with regards to their impact on the retweet count of the examined tweets. The model also examines associations between consumer involvement, as represented by tweets from different industries, and retweet counts for these tweets. Brands' tweets were downloaded with the help of the Twitonomy analytics tool and the data was coded using excel functions for presence and count of various tweet features in tweets. These tweet features were categorised into three different groups (interactive, textual and visual) and included in a multivariate regression analysis together with several control features such as number of followers, number of tweets posted, tweets with financial data (cashtags) and sponsored/promoted tweets for each brand handle. The analysis examined the impact of tweet features after controlling for non-tweet related features on the retweet count for brands' tweets. To assess the effect of involvement on retweeting, the regression analysis was conducted for the whole sample data as well as with data for each of the three industries. In addition, the analysis introduced non-linear terms, in order to estimate the effect of repeated use of tweet features in tweets. The results show that industry is an important moderator of the effect of tweet features on retweeting. The effect of some tweet features was consistent across industries

representing different levels of consumer involvement, but for others the effect was inconsistent, possibly due to different uses of social media across and within industries. After controlling for number of followers and brands' posting frequency, the interactive feature of hashtags, textual feature of retweet requests and visual tweet feature of photos were consistently associated with a higher retweet rate across industries. However, the effect of other interactive features (URL links, non-initial mentions and video) varied across industries, in some cases decreasing the retweet rate. The results therefore indicate that tweet design can be used by brands to maximise the effect of their communications and encourage retweeting of their tweets. These findings fulfil the first objective of the thesis to identify factors associated with increasing consumer engagement and the frequency of retweeting of organisational tweets. Understanding these factors can help improve organisational interactions with individuals on Twitter and facilitate the use of the platform for brand building and seeding word-of-mouth. In addition, the study addresses the objective of the thesis to examine the impact of consumer involvement on the probability of a tweet being retweeted by testing for consumer involvement in the model. Finally, by including detailed discussion on the implications, the study addresses the objective of the thesis to provide insights on the theoretical and managerial implications of using Twitter for marketing communications.

As the first author I had the initial idea for the research, and downloaded and organised the tweet data. I performed the analysis, but received support in the statistical approach and development of the theoretical model and proposed contribution of the research from the co-authors. I determined a publication target, sourced and synthesised the key literature and produced the first draft of the paper. The draft was further revised and improved by my principal supervisor (the second author on the paper), before I finalised the

submission. My principal supervisor also provided guidance in writing the response to reviewers once we received the first comments from the targeted publication.

The study has been published at the Journal of Marketing Management[9]. As with the other publications presented in the thesis, the paper has been slightly reformatted to ensure a consistent thesis style, with all references included in a combined reference list at the end of the thesis.

[9] Soboleva, A., Burton, S., Mallik, G., & Khan, A. (2017). 'Retweet for a Chance to…': an analysis of what triggers consumers to engage in seeded eWOM on Twitter. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(13-14), 1120-1148.

‘Retweet for a Chance to…’: An Analysis of What Triggers Consumers to Engage in Seeded eWOM on Twitter

Abstract

Twitter provides an important channel for brands to seed electronic word of mouth (eWOM) by followers retweeting brand messages, but prior research has not established a theoretical framework for how brands can maximise eWOM. This study presents and tests a theoretical model incorporating interactive, textual and visual tweet features to predict eWOM, using tweets by leading brands from three industries. Industry was found to be an important moderator of the effect of tweet features; after controlling for the reach and frequency of tweets, hashtags, retweet requests and photos were consistently associated with a higher retweet rate across industries, but the effect of URL links, non-initial mentions and video varied across industries, in some cases decreasing the retweet rate. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

We contribute to prior research by a) developing a theory based model of the predictors of eWOM on Twitter, and testing the model across three different industries reflecting high and low consumer involvement, b) estimating minimum and maximum threshold levels for tweet features that have a non-linear effect on retweeting, and c) showing how interactive, textual and visual features of tweets are associated with higher (and in some cases lower) average retweet counts.

Keywords: retweet, seeded eWOM, product involvement, hashtags, mentions

5.2 Introduction

Social media have been said to be a 'game changer' for industries, influencing companies to increase their social media budgets to promote their brands (Kumar, 2015b). Brands are expected to spend almost $35.9 billion worldwide on social media in 2017, representing 16% of their total digital expenditure (eMarketer, 2015). Part of the reason for this large spending on social media is the potential that social media offer for creating viral marketing recommendations from consumer to consumer, but achieving this goal is often elusive (Schulze, Schöler, & Skiera, 2014).

Among different social media platforms, existing research has highlighted that Twitter provides opportunities for marketers to facilitate consumer to consumer brand-related conversations due to its focus on sharing information and facilitating discussion (e.g., Canhoto & Clark, 2013; Smith et al., 2012). Brands can send tweets to their followers, with the aim that the messages will be sufficiently engaging for those followers to forward (or 'retweet') them to their own networks. Retweeting is an important activity on Twitter as it facilitates virality and the spread of real-time information (Rudat & Buder, 2015). However, there appear to be wide differences in consumer engagement with tweets between industries and between brands, with even leading brands in some industries having very low retweet rates (Soboleva et al., 2015). Thus it is important for both marketers and academics to better understand how various tweet features facilitate propagation of brand messages, whether there are significant differences between industries, and how brands can best influence consumers to forward brand messages to their own networks.

In this paper we analyse a sample of 13,712 tweets from 32 leading global brands in three different industries (Automotive, FMCG and Luxury) to examine the factors that predict retweeting of brand messages. We test to what extent the inclusion of interactive,

textual and visual features in tweets is associated with the frequency of retweeting brand messages.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on electronic word of mouth (eWOM), its importance for marketers, and how social media, and in particular, Twitter overcomes two of the main challenges for marketers in using eWOM as a marketing tool. Second, drawing on previous research in interactive marketing and advertising in the context of crafting viral tweets, we develop a theoretical framework depicting the factors that are theorised to increase consumer engagement with brand tweets, as demonstrated by retweeting those tweets. Third, we describe our data collection and analysis approach. Finally, we present the results of our analysis and discuss the implications for organisations' Twitter strategies and for research.

5.3 Theoretical framework

5.3.1 The power of electronic word of mouth in the age of social media

Word of mouth (WOM) has long been of interest to marketers, due to its influence on customer behaviour and choices (e.g., Brown & Reingen, 1987; Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis, 1969). WOM is perceived as more authentic, less biased, and thus has higher credibility than advertising messages (e.g., Bristor, 1990; Keller, 2007). However organisations have often struggled to systematically manage WOM because it is often generated by factors beyond firms' control (Haywood, 1989). In addition, the difficulty of measuring face to face word of mouth adds to the challenges in using WOM for marketing (Christiansen & Tax, 2000).

The advent of online communication channels such as Web-based opinion platforms increased the interest of marketers in online or electronic word of mouth (oWOM or eWOM)

(e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Before the advent of social media, eWOM was defined as:

'*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet*' (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.39)

Since that period, however, advances in digital technology in the past decade have vastly increased both the ways in which eWOM can be transmitted, and its importance as a marketing channel. In response, research into oWOM/eWOM has progressed from a focus on 'legacy' forms of eWOM such as consumer statements through product ratings and reviews, to incorporate newer forms of eWOM such as engaging on social media platforms (e.g., by likes, comments, shares, retweets and favourites) (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Although such eWOM often does not include the 'statement' reflected in the classic definition of eWOM, these newer forms of eWOM provide a measurable record that is available for the researcher or marketer (e.g., Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010), thus addressing one of the major challenges to using WOM for marketing discussed above.

However, consumer-initiated eWOM, whether on Web-based opinion platforms or on newer forms of social media, reflects the challenge of spoken WOM discussed above in being difficult or impossible for the marketer to manage, because the source of the eWOM is the consumer. Most early studies of eWOM focused on this type of consumer initiated (or peer-to-peer) eWOM (e.g., Fong & Burton, 2006; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Such studies do not reflect, however, that eWOM can be created either through opinion *giving* or opinion *passing* (Chu & Kim, 2011). That is, an individual can initiate WOM by transmitting their opinions to others, or pass on WOM received from others. There has been repeated

discussion in the literature consistent with this expanded conceptualisation of eWOM (e.g.,Araujo et al., 2017; Chu, Chen, & Sung, 2015; Kim et al., 2014; Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016; Zhang et al., 2011) However, surprisingly, we have not found an updated definition of eWOM reflecting its use for opinion passing, as well as opinion giving. Building on both Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2004) definition of eWOM and Chu and Kim's (2011) conceptualisation of eWOM on social networking sites, we therefore propose an updated definition of eWOM to incorporate its expanded use in the age of social media:

'*a process by which potential, actual or former customers give or pass on an opinion or statement about a product or company, which is made available online, potentially to a multitude of people and institutions'*

The potential for consumers to engage in favourable eWOM on social media by passing on messages therefore presents an opportunity for organisations, which can create communications in an attempt to encourage eWOM by using what have been called 'seeding' strategies (e.g., Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker, 2011; Koch & Benlian, 2015). The earliest form of such 'seeded' eWOM was probably email marketing, where an organisation's message, either implicitly or explicitly, encouraged the recipient to forward the email to their contacts. Pass-along of email messages and its measurement is, however, limited by the private nature of email. In contrast, the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, where users are easily able to create and forward brand related information to their networks (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008), has vastly increased the potential reach and measurability of eWOM - including the dissemination of tweets originating from firms (e.g., Hewett et al., 2016). So organisations can initiate or 'seed' eWOM on social media, and measure its dissemination - thereby providing the

opportunity to identify the characteristics of messages which are widely disseminated or 'go viral', as we discuss in the following section.

5.3.2 Retweeting as a measure of eWOM on Twitter

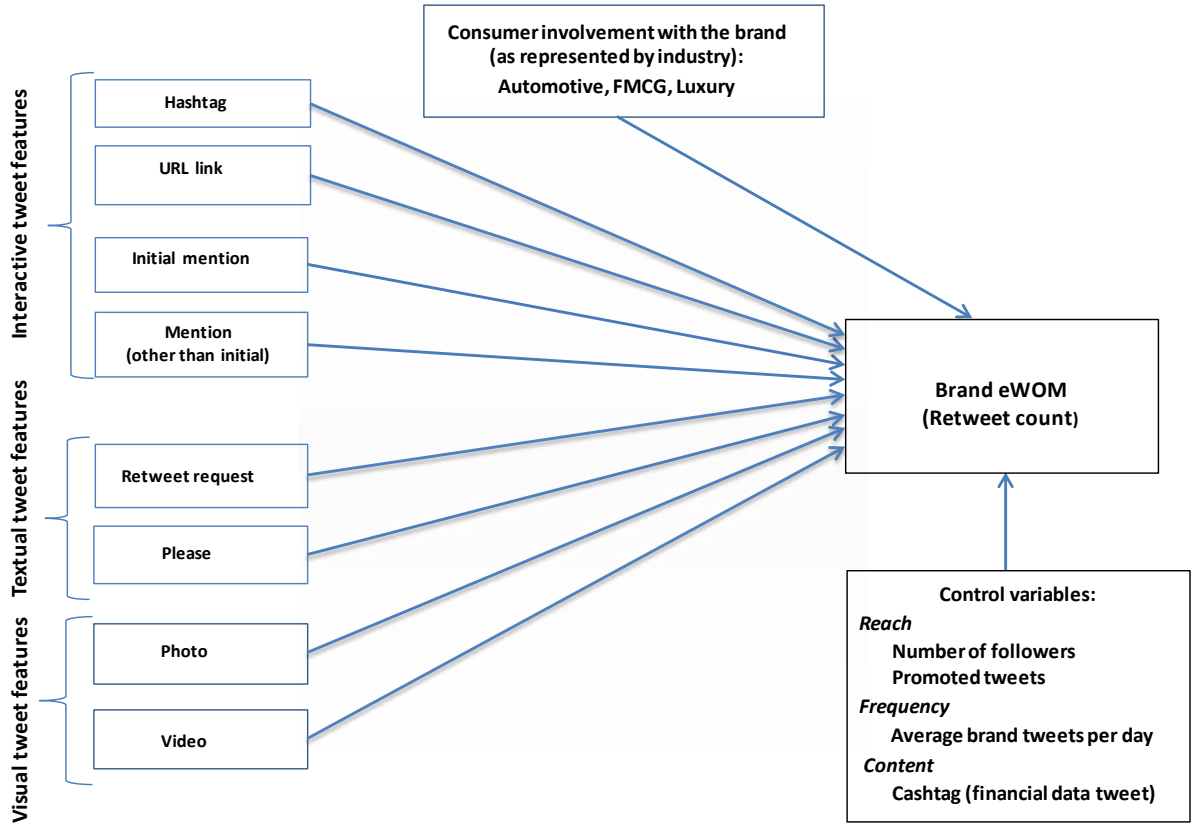
Among social media platforms, Twitter is particularly appropriate for seeding eWOM because users subscribe to messages from other users, including those by commercial organisations, and can also view a brand's posts without following the organisation. In addition, sharing others' posts, or 'retweeting' is easy – requiring only one click – and retweeting others' content is normal behaviour on Twitter.

So, if a brand's followers find that the brand's tweets are sufficiently engaging, they can retweet messages to their own networks, creating eWOM in the form of tweets (e.g., Williams, Inversini, Buhalis, & Ferdinand, 2015; Zhang et al., 2011). (While it is technically possible to retweet a brand message with critical commentary, Twitter's character length, and the observed association between retweeting and positive brand evaluations (Kim et al., 2014), mean that retweets are likely to largely reflect positive, or at least neutral, eWOM.) Retweeting of brand tweets is therefore an important measure of the success of a brand in generating eWOM on Twitter, as word of mouth disseminates across Twitter through retweets (Walker, Baines, Dimitriu, & Macdonald, 2017). Thus, understanding the factors that increase (or decrease) the probability of a message being retweeted is critical for effective marketing on Twitter. In the next section, we present a theoretical model summarising the factors that are expected to increase the probability that a message will be retweeted.

5.3.3 What predicts retweeting? A theoretical model

While Twitter is a relatively recent phenomenon, there is an emerging body of empirical research exploring tweet features that are associated with higher retweet rates (e.g., Araujo et al., 2015; Malhotra et al., 2012; Suh et al., 2010). Such research, however, lacks a unifying theoretical model to explain why different tweet features may increase (or decrease) retweeting. However, there is a large body of research into advertising effectiveness that is relevant for identifying factors that may influence the effectiveness of Twitter communications. Drawing on both these fields of literature, we first develop a theoretical model of factors that are likely to drive consumer engagement with brand tweets, operationalised as the frequency of retweeting (see Figure 1), and then go on to test that model. In the next section, we review each of these factors separately, as well as control variables that are relevant for the study.

Figure 5-1: Engagement mechanisms that facilitate retweeting behaviour



5.3.3.1 Consumer involvement with the product category

Consumers' interest in retweeting a brand tweet is likely to depend on their involvement with the brand and/or product category and/or message, following past research that reported that product and message involvement were two of the main motivations for consumers to talk about a product or service (Dichter, 1966). Consistent with that research, one study has found that product involvement (in the form of fashion involvement) and brand involvement are the key motivators for eWOM by consumers (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In a social media environment, consumer involvement appears to influence reactions to promotional messages, with lowly involved consumers being particularly drawn to

entertainment content, and highly involved consumers responding more to informational messages (Coursaris, van Osch, Balogh, & Quilliam, 2014).

Consistent with the potential importance of involvement for moderating consumer responses to brand messages discussed above, this study examines retweeting of tweets from leading brands in three different industries. One of the industries represents FMCG (CPG) companies, a low involvement product category, since the products are low risk and not very important to the consumer (Silayoi & Speece, 2004). The other two – Luxury and Automobiles - represent high involvement products, since the products relate strongly to self-representation and are infrequently purchased (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Thus, Figure 1 models a consumer's likelihood of retweeting a brand message as varying according to the consumer's level of involvement, as represented by industries offering high and low involvement products.

5.3.3.2 Interactivity of Twitter messages

Interactivity has been an area of focus for marketers for at least 20 years (e.g., Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Hoffman & Novak, 1996), because interactivity can increase consumer attention and flow (Hoffman & Novak, 1996), and forms the basis of long-term two-way relationships with customers (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Although there are different definitions of interactivity (Hui & Nadda, 2014), one widely cited source defines interactivity as 'the extent to which users can participate in modifying the messages they receive' (Steuer, 1992, p.84). Building on Steuer's definition, Hoffman and Novak (1996) argued that computer mediated environments (such as Twitter, though they were writing before the advent of Twitter) can allow interactivity *with* the medium (which they called 'machine interactivity') in addition to *through* a medium (which they called 'person

interactivity'). While Twitter, like all social media, allows person interactivity, different Twitter design features encourage Twitter followers to interact with the medium, for example, by clicking on an embedded hyperlink in a tweet. In this study, we extend Hoffman and Novak's analysis, by analysing the extent to which interactive and other tweet features increase consumer engagement with tweets, as measured by the frequency of retweeting. Interactive features of tweets represent the first group of mechanisms to facilitate retweeting behaviour shown in Figure 1, and in the following section we discuss each separately.

Hashtags

The use of hashtags linked to keywords in tweets (e.g., #xmasdeals) enables users to discover and follow tweets containing the same hashtag, and can therefore improve content discovery (Huang et al., 2010). The presence of a hashtag in a tweet is thus an example of machine interactivity because such a tweet has a greater probability of being found by individuals who do not follow the tweet's sender, but who are sufficiently interested in the hashtag's topic to search for tweets containing that hashtag. Possibly because the use of a hashtag means that a larger number of people see the tweet, the inclusion of a hashtag in a tweet has been found to increase the retweet rate (Burton & Soboleva, 2011; Suh et al., 2010). One recent estimate found that inclusion of a hashtag increases the retweet rate by 46% (Kerns, 2014). However, the effect of including one or more hashtags in a tweet may be non-linear: another study found that tweets containing one to three hashtags are more likely to be retweeted than tweets without hashtags, but as the number of hashtags in a tweet grew, the average number of retweets decreased (Jenders, Kasneci, & Naumann, 2013). Thus, Figure 1 models hashtags in a tweet as increasing the probability of retweeting, but the model tested also includes a squared and a cubic term to test for a non-linear effect of hashtags on retweeting.

URL links

Inclusion of a URL link in a tweet, thereby providing users with access to extra information, is another example of machine interactivity (Burton & Soboleva, 2011). For example, URL links are said to increase interactivity of websites (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005) and social media brand posts (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Hyperlinked tweets are considered more informative (Sedhai & Sun, 2014) and are likely to be more interesting (Alonso et al., 2010). These presumed effects may explain repeated findings that tweets with URL links, on average, are retweeted more often (e.g., Naveed et al., 2011; Son, Lee, & Kim, 2013; Suh et al., 2010). In contrast, however, two other studies have reported that inclusion of a URL did not increase retweeting (Malhotra et al., 2012; Saxton et al., 2015), suggesting that the effect of URL links may be less clear-cut than has been suggested by previous literature. In line with most findings in this area, however, Figure 1 models the presence of a URL link as being associated with the probability of retweeting.

Mentions and initial mentions

Mentioning others in a tweet is another form of interactivity; by mentioning others, the interpersonal interactivity of the tweet is increased (Burton & Soboleva, 2011) – primarily for mentioned users, but also for any other users who are interested in the mentioned users (for example, people who follow mentioned celebrities). Mentions are also, however, a form of machine interactivity, since including a mention in a tweet results in the tweet being automatically sent to the person or brand Twitter handle. Consistent with this possibility, previous authors have examined the effect of mentions on retweet count and found varying results: either no effect of mentions on retweeting (Petrovic et al., 2011), a marginal negative effect (Suh et al., 2010) or a significant negative effect (Tan, Lee, & Pang, 2014).

However, the effect of a mention may depend on whether it is at the start of a tweet (i.e. an 'initial mention tweet'), or elsewhere within the tweet. For example, research studying linguistic and interactional features of an earlier online communication channel – internet relay chat (Werry, 1996) - has discussed the value of using a person's name at the beginning of an utterance to capture the addressee's attention, in a way that a reference (or, on Twitter, a mention) later in the message may not achieve. Drawing on Werry's research, an initial mention tweet thus accomplishes what has been called 'addressivity' (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). As well as capturing the attention of a mentioned person (or brand) as discussed above, a mention at the start of a tweet may also capture the attention of others, if the mentioned person (or brand) is of sufficient interest, thus potentially resulting in an increased number of retweets. For instance, recent research has shown that tweets are more likely to be retweeted if they have been retweeted by an influential person, such as a celebrity (e.g., Araujo et al., 2017) Consistent with this logic, Figure 1 models a tweet that starts with an initial mention as having a higher probability of being retweeted relative to tweets without an initial mention.

A mention elsewhere in a tweet, while lacking the addressivity of an initial mention tweet, is also likely to draw the attention of the mentioned person (or brand), thus potentially resulting in them retweeting the message, and potential retweets by their followers, albeit a smaller increase than may be achieved by an initial mention tweet if addressivity is important. Thus, Figure 1 proposes that the presence of a mention elsewhere in a tweet will influence the retweet rate. However, consistent with both the theoretical potential for mentions to increase retweets, and with previous reports of both negative and/or absent effects of mentions on retweets, as discussed earlier, the direction of effect is uncertain.

5.3.3.3 Textual and visual Twitter features

Apart from the interactive tweet features discussed above, shown as the first group in Figure 1, the probability of retweeting is likely to depend on textual and visual features of the tweet, as shown in the second and third groups on the left in Figure 1. Just as a printed or web advertisement is typically a combination of design elements such as text and images, a carefully crafted brand tweet can combine linguistic features and imagery elements that may increase its virality. Figure 1 therefore models the effect of different textual and visual tweet features, with each discussed separately below.

Retweet Request

A call to action is an advertising technique for increasing customer response that has been used for more than a century (e.g., Starch, 1914). The use of a clear call to action attracts attention and makes it easier for consumers to act on a specific request (Armstrong, 2010). For example, a call to action in SMS advertising has been shown to facilitate brand recall (Rettie, Grandcolas, & Deakins, 2005) and for display banner ads, significantly increase response (Chandon, Chtourou, & Fortin, 2003; Li & Bukovac, 1999). A retweet request within the text of a tweet is another form of call to action, which, following the research on calls to action in advertising, would be expected to increase retweeting. Consistent with this argument, other types of call to action (such as tweets soliciting the public's help) have been found to increase the number of retweets of non-profits' tweets (Guidry, Waters, & Saxton, 2014). Since it calls on the tweet recipient to respond, a retweet request could be classified as an interactive tweet feature. However, the effectiveness of calls to action will always depend on the justification for the call, which in a tweet is encapsulated in text, and therefore best categorised as a textual tweet feature.

There are varying commercial studies of the effectiveness of direct appeals for retweeting, reporting increases in retweeting ranging from 34% with inclusion of a retweet request (Malhotra et al., 2012) to 1,200% (Salesforce, 2013). A retweet request may, however, be less effective for low involvement brands/goods, since the subsequent step for action is obvious for these products (Armstrong, 2010). Consistent with the empirical evidence that inclusion of a retweet request increases retweeting, Figure 1 therefore models a retweet request as increasing the probability of retweeting, though possibly varying with the product type involved (i.e., low or high involvement).

Using the word 'please' in tweets

The study also tests the effect of a more subtle request, as expressed by the word 'please', since a polite request may receive more attention and subsequent action than an assertive request (Forgas, 1998). Polite requestors have higher potential to receive a response in line with politeness theory, which indicates that speakers generally choose more polite strategies to mitigate the seriousness of their request (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Polite requests asking customers to engage in word-of-mouth activity have also been shown to increase WOM (Söderlund & Mattsson, 2015), with one study on Twitter demonstrating a positive impact of the use of word 'please' on retweets (Tan et al., 2014). Some researchers recommend companies use polite requests to retweet their messages in order to increase engagement by users and customers (Malhotra et al., 2012). Thus, Figure 1 proposes that the presence of the word 'please' in a tweet will be associated with a higher retweet rate.

Photos in tweets

In addition to the textual tweet features discussed above, the probability of a tweet being retweeted is likely to depend on visual tweet features. For example, a substantial body

of research has shown that pictures can increase the effect of advertisements, in part because pictures can project meanings that cannot be expressed via words or music (Messaris, 1996). In print advertising, both the size and the colour of pictures have been found to influence overall affect towards the brand (Percy & Rossiter, 1983). Images can also improve recall of the verbal information of the ad (e.g., Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991), increase the potential for attitude change (Rossiter & Percy, 1980) and influence consumer persuasion (e.g., McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). In social media, vividness (which can be represented by animations, contrasting colours or pictures) can enhance the number of likes of a Facebook brand post (de Vries et al., 2012). Conflicting evidence exists on the effect of images in tweets, with one study finding that tweets with photo links do not impact retweetability (Malhotra et al., 2012) and another reporting that tweets with links to photos are retweeted more than twice as much compared to tweets without such links (Bruni, Francalanci, & Giacomazzi, 2012). Therefore, Figure 1 models photos in tweets as increasing the probability of retweeting. However, users have the option to include more than one photo in a tweet, and it is not clear whether including more than one photo will increase the frequency of retweeting (by providing additional content), or decrease retweeting (due to increased visual complexity in the message). The model therefore tests for a non-linear effect of an increased number of pictures in a tweet.

Videos in tweets

Until recently, to provide access to video (or photos) a tweet needed to include a URL link that a user could click on to view the video (or photo). However, since late 2013, Twitter allows users to embed videos (and photos), so instead of the user having to leave Twitter, the tweet itself expands to show the content (Cooper, 2013).

Although embedded video is relatively new on Twitter, earlier advertising research may be relevant for predicting its effect. In web advertisements, animated banner ads appear to increase click-through intention and advertising recall (Yoo, Kihan, & Stout, 2004). The popularity of videos is likely to be because they tap into fundamental human feelings; one study found that surprise and joy were dominant emotions in the most successful viral videos (Dafonte-Gomez, 2015). Videos on Twitter have been shown to enhance the richness of content and help marketers with different tasks from promotion to problem resolution (Leek et al., 2016). Twitter users may thus be more likely to retweet tweets containing video content. As with photos, Figure 1 therefore proposes that the presence of video in a tweet will be associated with a higher retweet rate.

5.3.3.4 Control variables

Reach

The probability of a tweet being retweeted is likely to depend, in part, on how many users the tweet reaches, because if more people receive the tweet, there are more people who can retweet it. The number of followers is thus an indicator of a Twitter handle's reach (Kwak et al., 2010), though it does not reflect the increased reach that will be achieved if those followers retweet the message.

Brands can also increase the reach of a tweet using 'promoted tweets', an advertising option that allows users (such as brands) to pay for tweets to appear in the feeds of users, including those who do not follow the brand. Such an approach exposes a promoted tweet to a larger number of people who can potentially retweet it. Promoted tweets can generate engagement and positive sentiment for brands (Dacres, Haddadi, & Purver, 2013), but because they are labelled as promoted tweets, can discourage customers from further

engagement or interaction (Wood & Burkhalter, 2013). Given the importance of the number of followers and the potential for a brand to increase the reach of a tweet by promoting it, the model tested therefore includes both number of followers and tweet promotion (no/yes) as control variables.

Frequency

The retweet rate of a brand's tweets may also depend on how often the brand posts on Twitter. One study examined brands' creative strategies on Twitter, Facebook and other social sharing platforms and found that frequent updates and incentives for participation are important for customer engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Another study suggested that organisations can be considered active if they tweet at least three times per week (Lovejoy et al., 2012), although other researchers have found that to keep consumer engagement, tweets need to be updated every 24 hours (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). It is likely, however, that only some minimum level of Twitter activity may be necessary; one study of 13 companies found that posting more tweets per day was not associated with a higher level of retweets (Mamic & Almaraz, 2013). The tested model therefore includes the average number of tweets sent by a brand each day as a control variable, and includes a square term to capture the assumed non-linear effects of frequency of tweeting.

Content

A 'cashtag' is made up of a company's ticker symbol, preceded by a dollar sign (e.g. $TWTR for Twitter) and as with a hashtag, a user can click on a cashtag to find other tweets containing the same cashtag. There are only a small number of tweets that contain cashtags, but the financial data that is available from these tweets provides insights into stocks and companies (Hentschel & Alonso, 2014). Being information rich, tweets containing cashtags

may be of little interest to consumers who do not value task-oriented content, and as a consequence they may be retweeted less often, consistent with research that has found that task-oriented messages are retweeted less frequently than socioemotional messages (Lin & Peña, 2011). Figure 1 thus models the presence of a cashtag in a tweet as a control variable, and associated with a lower retweet rate.

5.4 Method

5.4.1 Sample and Data Collection

Brands for analysis were chosen from Interbrand's Best Global Brands report (Interbrand, 2013). Since the interest of the study was in consumer response to organisational tweets, three B2C industries were chosen for analysis, including one low involvement product category (FMCG), and two high involvement product categories (Automotive and Luxury).

All brands on the Interbrand list within the three selected industries had Twitter handles except for one luxury brand (Hermes), resulting in a sample of 11 FMCG brands, 14 Automotive and 7 Luxury brands. Many companies have more than one Twitter handle, so the central organisational handle (and in the absence of an obvious central handle, the one with the largest number of followers) was chosen for analysis, consistent with Araujo, Neijens, and Vliegenthart (2017). One FMCG brand, (Heinz), was excluded due to very low Twitter activity during the study period. Despite the relatively small number of brands within each industry category, the analysis therefore includes a Twitter handle from the entire population of active Twitter users among top-ranked brands in the three industries analysed. A list of all brands and Twitter handles examined is available in the appendix.

All tweets from the selected Twitter handles, and the retweet count for each tweet, were collected for a six-month period of 1st May 2014 to 30th October 2014 using Twitonomy's premium subscription service. This resulted in an initial sample of 38,756 tweets. However, 25,044 tweets were excluded from the analysis. The majority (21,221) were excluded because they were replies to other tweets, including 21,187 private replies, which are not sent to the sender's entire network, and so are likely to be retweeted less often. 3,817 were excluded because they were retweets by the examined brands (and the brand is therefore not credited with further retweets), and 6 because they were extreme outliers in the number of retweets, consistent with Araujo, Neijens, and Vliegenthart, (2017). The final sample size was therefore 13,712 tweets. Table 1 below provides a summary of the number of followers and tweets posted by each industry, after excluding outliers.

Table 5-1: Number of followers and tweets posted by industry after exclusions

Industry (brands)	Auto (n=14)		FMCG (n=11)		Luxury (n=7)		All (n=32)	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Followers per brand	475,013	299,625	49,455	37,622	1,579,033	1,502,935	554,451	887,984
Tweets posted per day per brand	2.58	1.43	1.79	2.22	2.74	3.57	2.34	2.25

5.4.2 Operationalisation of variables

Table 2 shows the operationalisation of the variables in the model and summary statistics. Tweets were coded for the presence and/or count of each independent variable using Excel formulas. There was wide variation in the use of different tweet features; hashtags and photos were the most widely used features, respectively occurring in 65.4% and 57.9% of tweets. In contrast, cashtags, retweet requests and the word 'please' were rarely used, each occurring in less than 1% of tweets. The correlation matrix of the variables was reviewed, and did not demonstrate multicollinearity between the variables (see appendix).

Table 5-2: Operationalisation of variables and summary statistics

Variable	Operationalisation	% of tweets	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Dependent variable			
RetweetCount	Number of retweets of each individual tweet (ranging from 0 to 6,090)	n/a	74.65	224.57
	Independent variables			
	Interactive tweet features			
Hashtag	The number of hashtags in a tweet	65.4%	1.09	0.95
$Hashtag^2$	Square of the number of hashtags	n/a	2.09	3.44
$Hashtag^3$	Cube of the number of hashtags	n/a	5.16	18.05
InitialMention	Mention at the start of a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	2.9%	0.03	0.17
Mention	Presence of a non-initial mention in a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	33.9%	0.47	0.77
URLlink	Presence of a URL link in a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	50.0%	0.48	0.50
	Textual tweet features			
RetweetRequest	Presence of retweet request in a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	0.6%	0.01	0.08
Please	Presence of the word 'please' in a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	0.2%	0.01	0.04
	Visual tweet features			
Photo	The number of photos in a tweet	57.9%	0.62	0.61
$Photo^2$	Square of the number of photos	n/a	0.75	1.52
Video	Presence of video in a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	3.8%	0.04	0.19
	Control features			
lnFollowers	Natural logarithm of number of followers for each brand (to account for non-normality due to a heavy tail distribution)	n/a	12.74	1.33
PromotedTweet	Tweet that has been posted via Twitter Ads platform (i.e. has been paid for) (=1, 0 otherwise)	1.7%	0.017	0.13
TweetsPerDay	The average number of tweets posted by each brand per day	n/a	4.13	3.18
$TweetsPerDay^2$	Square of the number of tweets posted per day	n/a	27.21	38.18
Cashtag	Presence of a cashtag in a tweet (=1, 0 otherwise)	0.6%	0.01	0.08
	Consumer involvement with product category			
DAuto	Automotive industry (=1, 0 otherwise)	48%	n/a	n/a
DLuxury	Luxury industry (=1, 0 otherwise)	26%	n/a	n/a
DFMCG	FMCG industry (=1, 0 otherwise)	26%	n/a	n/a

5.4.3 Empirical model

The dependent variable - retweet count - is a count variable, thus it is most appropriate to use either Poisson or negative binomial regression. Initially a Poisson distribution model was applied, however the conditional variance of the dependent variable exceeded the mean, and the goodness-of-fit (chi-square) test was significant (suggesting over-dispersion). The model was therefore tested using negative binomial regression, which allows for over-dispersion of the dependent variable (Cameron & Trivedi, 1986). There were 259 (1.89%) tweets with zero retweets, but the p-value for the Vuong test (Vuong, 1989) was 1.00, which implies that the negative binomial model is not adversely affected by excessive zeros in the dependent variable.

The model tested was as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{RetweetCount}_i = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Hashtag}_i + \beta_2 \text{Hashtag}_i^2 + \beta_3 \text{Hashtag}_i^3 + \beta_4 \text{InitialMention}_i + \beta_5 \text{Mention}_i \\ & + \beta_6 \text{URLlink}_i + \beta_7 \text{RetweetRequest}_i + \beta_8 \text{Please}_i + \beta_9 \text{Photo}_i + \beta_{10} \text{Photo}_i^2 + \beta_{11} \text{Video}_i \\ & + \beta_{12} \ln\text{Followers} + \beta_{13} \text{PromotedTweet}_i + \beta_{14} \text{TweetsPerDay}_i + \beta_{15} \text{TweetsPerDay}_i^2 + \beta_{16} \text{Cashtag}_i \\ & + \beta_{17} \text{DAuto}_i + \beta_{18} \text{DLuxury}_i + e_i \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

The model shown in equation (1) was first used for the full sample, and then applied separately to each of the three industries (i.e. Auto, FMCG and Luxury), as discussed in the following section. An alternative model, replacing FMCG with Auto as the reference industry, was also tested to allow estimation of any difference between the two high involvement industries. The analysis was performed with Stata software, version 14.

5.5 Results

Table 3 shows the estimated coefficients and corresponding z-statistics for different specifications of equation (1) above. That is, equation (1) was initially run without the non-

linear terms (see Model 1 column), then a square term (Model 2) and cubic term (Model 3) for Hashtag were progressively added. Estimated coefficients and z scores for each model are shown in the respective columns, along with their sign and significance. Model 3 revealed significant coefficients for all square terms ($Hashtag^2$, $Photo^2$ and $TweetsPerDay^2$) and $Hashtag^3$ and a higher Pseudo R^2, so the following discussion focuses on Model 3. The marginal effects of the coefficients for that model are shown in the last column, indicating the amount of change in retweet count that is predicted from a one-unit change in the independent variable, after allowing for other factors.

Table 5-3: Negative Binomial model predicting RetweetCount (full sample)

		Estimated coefficients and z scores			Marginal effects Model 3[1]
Model		**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	
Interactive tweet features	Hashtag	0.100*** (10.83)	-0.025*** (-1.05)	-0.222*** (-7.63)	-16.177*** (-7.51)
	Hashtag^2		0.055*** (7.15)	0.175*** (13.09)	12.710*** (12.53)
	Hashtag^3			-0.016*** (-12.81)	-1.149*** (-12.31)
	InitialMention	0.345*** (6.58)	0.391*** (7.57)	0.354*** (6.89)	25.770*** (6.83)
	Mention	-0.129*** (-10.89)	-0.115*** (-9.86)	-0.109*** (-9.44)	-7.961*** (-9.34)
	URLlink	-0.204*** (-10.85)	-0.11*** (-6.12)	-0.122*** (-6.54)	-8.844*** (-6.5)
Textual tweet features	RetweetRequest	1.171*** (10.52)	1.283*** (11.79)	1.270*** (11.71)	92.348*** (11.53)
	Please	0.261 (1.37)	0.150 (0.81)	0.139 (0.75)	10.109 (0.75)
Visual tweet features	Photo	0.801*** (40.6)	1.206*** (42.61)	1.213*** (43.1)	88.206*** (35.47)
	Photo^2		-0.227*** (-22.79)	-0.229*** (-23.07)	-16.625*** (-21.73)
	Video	-0.094* (-1.98)	0.075 (1.61)	0.084 (1.81)	6.121 (1.81)
Control features	LnFollowers	0.515*** (42.33)	0.605*** (46.41)	0.607*** (46.72)	44.169*** (36.62)
	PromotedTweet	0.892*** (13.46)	0.840*** (12.89)	0.849*** (13.08)	61.767*** (12.59)
	TweetsPerDay	-0.024*** (-7.39)	-0.290*** (-17.03)	-0.294*** (-17.32)	-21.363*** (-16.81)
	TweetsPerDay^2		0.024*** (15.93)	0.025*** (16.18)	1.794*** (15.79)
	Cashtag	-1.104*** (-9.54)	-0.975*** (-8.56)	-0.956*** (-8.43)	-69.545*** (-8.39)
Industry	DFMCG	Default reference industry			
	DAuto	0.291*** (8.95)	0.105*** (3.20)	0.084** (2.57)	6.098** (2.59)
	DLuxury	0.730*** (16.29)	0.166*** (3.16)	0.139*** (2.65)	10.107*** (2.66)
	Constant	-3.509*** (-25.84)	-4.132*** (-29.79)	-4.096*** (-29.61)	
	Sample size	13712	13712	13712	13712
	Max for Hashtag	N/A	N/A	6	
	Min for Hashtag	N/A	N/A	1	
	Max for Photo	N/A	N/A	3	
	Min for TweetsPerDay	N/A	N/A	6	
	LR χ^2 (p-value)	11183.55 (<0.001)	11891.52 (<0.001)	12003.48 (<0.001)	
	Pseudo R^2	0.0788	0.0838	0.0846	
	Alpha (p-value)	0.9532 (<0.001)	0.9104 (<0.001)	0.9039 (<0.001)	

[1] Delta method was used to calculate marginal effects

Note *, **, *** show significance at p <0.05, <0.01 and <0.001 respectively

The results for Model 3 show that after allowing for the control variables, InitialMention (an interactive tweet feature) and RetweetRequest (a textual tweet feature) both have a significant positive effect on RetweetCount. In contrast, Mention and URLlink (both interactive tweet features) each have a significant negative linear effect on RetweetCount. In Model 1, where non-linear terms were not included, Video (a visual tweet feature) had a significant negative effect on RetweetCount. However, in both of the models including non-linear terms, Video was not significant. Including the word 'Please' had no significant effect on frequency of retweeting in any of the three models.

Interpreting the results for the three variables where a non-linear relationship was assessed (i.e. Hashtag, Photo and TweetsPerDay), is less straightforward. For these variables, the nature of their relationship with the dependent variable is shown by the sign of the coefficients of the linear and square terms, and for Hashtag, the cubic term, as seen in the results for Model 3. For example, the estimated coefficient for Hashtag is negative, for $Hashtag^2$ positive and for $Hashtag^3$ negative, with each significant at the $p<0.001$ level, implying that inclusion of a minimal number of hashtags in a tweet, *or* including too many hashtags, decreases the number of retweets after allowing for other factors. As a result, the estimated maximum and minimum threshold levels of Hashtag were determined using a process previously used with continuous variables (Mallik, Basu, Hicks, & Sappey, 2014) by differentiating equation (1) with respect to Hashtag as follows:

Differentiating equation (1) with respect to Hashtag and equating with zero, we get,

$$\frac{d\text{RetweetCount}_i}{d\text{Hashtag}_i} = \beta_1 + 2\beta_2 \text{Hashtag}_i + 3\beta_3 \text{Hashtag}_i^2 = 0 \qquad (2)$$

Solving equation (2) for Hashtag, we get $\text{Hashtag} = \frac{-2\beta_2 \pm \sqrt{(2\beta_2)^2 - 4 \times 3\beta_3 \times \beta_1}}{2 \times 3\beta_3}$

The negative coefficient for Hashtag in Model 3 in Table 3, coupled with the minimum level for Hashtag of 1, therefore shows that including one hashtag in a tweet, on average, decreases the retweet count for that tweet compared to a tweet with no hashtag (by a predicted 16.177 retweets; see Marginal Effects, Model 3 above). However, the positive coefficient for $Hashtag^2$ and the negative coefficient for $Hashtag^3$, coupled with the estimated maximum for Hashtag of 6, show that the model predicts that including two or more hashtags, up to a maximum of six hashtags, increases the predicted number of retweets of a tweet. A similar process was used to obtain maximum and minimum levels for Photo and TweetsPerDay, with the results shown in Table 3.

Table 3 also shows significant differences in RetweetCount depending on the industry, with both Auto and Luxury tweets being retweeted significantly more than the reference industry, FMCG. Analysis of the alternative model (using Auto as the reference industry) showed no significant difference in the frequency of retweeting between the Auto and Luxury industry tweets (data not shown). Comparison of tweet features across the three industries also showed large differences in the usage of different tweet features (see Table 4). For example, 79% of Auto tweets included one or more hashtags, but only 32% of Luxury tweets included a hashtag. Auto tweets were also much more likely to include one or more photos (in 70% of tweets), compared to 35% of FMCG tweets. In contrast, Auto tweets were less likely to include URL links (in 42% of tweets), compared to Luxury, with links in 59% of tweets.

Table 5-4: Percentage and number of tweets with and without tweet features

	Auto (n=6599)		FMCG (n=3603)		Luxury (n=3510)	
	With % (n)	**Without % (n)**	**With % (n)**	**Without % (n)**	**With % (n)**	**Without% (n)**
Hashtag (1 or more)	79% (5232)	21% (1367)	72% (2593)	28% (1010)	32% (1138)	68% (2372)
Hashtag (2 or more)	36% (2358)	64% (4241)	23% (820)	77% (2783)	17% (604)	83% (2906)
InitialMention	3% (209)	97% (6390)	2% (75)	98% (3528)	3% (112)	97% (3398)
Mention	40% (2642)	60% (3957)	30% (1072)	70% (2531)	27% (933)	73% (2577)
URLlink	42% (2777)	58% (3822)	55% (1986)	45% (1617)	59% (2096)	41% (1414)
RetweetRequest	0.4% (27)	99.6% (6572)	1.3% (46)	98.7% (3557)	0.3% (8)	99.7% (3502)
Please	0.3% (15)	99.7% (6584)	0.2% (4)	99.8% (3599)	0.3% (8)	99.7% (3502)
Photo	70% (4652)	30% (1947)	35% (1268)	65% (2335)	58% (2027)	42% (1483)
Photo (2 or more)	3% (194)	97% (6405)	0.6% (23)	99.4% (3580)	2% (56)	98% (3454)
Video	5% (363)	95% (6236)	1.5% (55)	98.5% (3548)	3% (115)	97% (3395)
PromotedTweet	1% (74)	99% (6525)	0.5% (18)	95.5% (3585)	4% (141)	96% (3369)
Cashtag	0.2% (11)	99.8% (6587)	2.1% (76)	97.8% (3527)	0% (0)	100% (3510)

Given the significant difference in retweet rate between industries, as shown in Table 3, and the differences in tweet composition across industries, as shown in Table 4, separate models were run for each industry to test whether the effects of tweet features were consistent across the three industries. The results are shown in Table 5, with estimated coefficients and marginal effects for each industry.

A comparison of the significance and direction of the coefficients across Table 3 (the full sample model) and Table 5 (separate industry models) shows that while the effect of some tweet features is consistent across industries (i.e., RetweetRequest, LnFollowers, Photo and TweetsPerDay), the effect of other variables varies across the three industries. For example, in the full model (Model 3 in Table 3), InitialMention had a significant and positive effect on RetweetCount, and the same effect was observed for the Auto model (see Table 5). However, InitialMention had a significant and *negative* effect on RetweetCount in the Luxury model, and was not significant in the FMCG model (Table 5). Two other variables that were not significant in the full sample model (Video and Please) each had a significant and positive effect on RetweetCount in one industry (respectively, Luxury and Auto). Other variables (i.e., Mention, URLlink and Cashtag), each negatively and significantly associated with RetweetCount in the full model, were not significantly associated with RetweetCount in one of the three industries. For Hashtags the same direction of non-linear pattern was observed for each industry, though for FMCG the linear and cubic terms were not significant, and the models estimated different minimum and maximum thresholds.

Table 5-5: Negative Binomial model predicting RetweetCount for industries

		Auto		FMCG		Luxury	
		Estimated coefficients (z score)	Marginal effects	Estimated coefficients (z score)	Marginal effects	Estimated coefficients (z score)	Marginal effects
	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Interactive features	Hashtag	-0.126** (-3.06)	-7.963*** (-3.05)	-0.102 (-1.32)	-1.185 (-1.32)	-0.326*** (-5.65)	-57.845*** (-5.6)
	Hashtag^2	0.124*** (6.99)	7.824*** (6.83)	0.140 ** (2.44)	1.625** (2.44)	0.123*** (3.28)	21.739*** (3.27)
	Hashtag^3	-0.011*** (-7.00)	-0.701*** (-6.84)	-0.020 (-1.73)	-0.231 (-1.73)	-0.013** (-2.33)	-2.388** (-2.33)
	Initial Mention	0.552*** (7.73)	34.826*** (7.59)	0.151 (1.33)	1.747 (1.33)	-0.464*** (-5.15)	-82.189*** (-5.06)
	Mention	-0.119*** (-7.48)	-7.476*** (-7.37)	-0.047* (-2.05)	-0.549* (-2.05)	0.028 (1.01)	4.961 (1.01)
	URLlink	0.023 (0.82)	1.474 (0.82)	-0.119*** (-3.47)	-1.382*** (-3.45)	-0.320*** (-8.29)	-56.634*** (-7.98)
Textual features	Retweet Request	0.884*** (4.8)	55.717*** (4.77)	1.505*** (10.89)	17.452*** (10.12)	1.626*** (5.3)	288.108*** (5.23)
	Please	0.489* (1.99)	30.851* (1.99)	-0.615 (-1.17)	-7.127 (-1.17)	-0.632 (-1.85)	-111.963 (-1.85)
Visual features	Photo	1.100*** (24.78)	69.351*** (24.75)	0.872*** (17.20)	10.108*** (17.20)	1.783*** (23.62)	315.839*** (23.62)
	Photo^2	-0.192*** (-13.73)	-12.081*** (-13.73)	-0.194*** (-8.13)	-2.255*** (-7.91)	-0.378*** (-20.11)	-66.955*** (-17.26)
	Video	-0.103 (-1.72)	-6.523 (-1.72)	0.151 (1.15)	1.745 (1.15)	0.522*** (5.58)	92.508*** (5.53)
Control features	LnFollowers	0.561*** (26.25)	35.386*** (22.37)	1.053*** (28.72)	12.206*** (22.21)	0.967*** (34.51)	171.394*** (21.96)
	Promoted Tweet	-0.054 (-0.47)	-3.377 (-0.47)	0.444* (2.03)	5.153* (2.03)	1.127*** (14.33)	199.613*** (12.45)
	Tweets PerDay	-1.255*** (-14.72)	-79.102*** (-14.72)	-1.142*** (-17.54)	-13.238*** (-15.3)	-1.042*** (-20.02)	-184.597*** (-16.16)
	Tweets PerDay^2	0.215*** (11.95)	13.542*** (11.49)	0.115*** (17.67)	1.337*** (15.39)	0.084*** (19.62)	14.855*** (15.97)
	Cashtag	-0.316 (-1.32)	-19.890 (-1.32)	-0.846*** (-6.01)	-9.807*** (-6.01)	N/A	N/A
	Constant	-2.323*** (-8.48)		-7.902*** (-23.35)		-7.866*** (-22.75)	
	Sample size	6599		3603		3510	
	Max for Hashtag	7		4		4	
	Min for Hashtag	1		1		2	
	Max for Photo	3		2		2	
	Min for Tweets PerDay	3		5		6	
	LR χ^2 (p-value)	2217.83 (<0.001)		1493.24 (<0.001)		2894.59 (<0.001)	
	Pseudo R^2	0.0328		0.0595		0.0681	
	Alfa (p-value)	0.89626 (<0.001)		0.78884 (<0.001)		0.74039 (<0.001)	

Note *, **, *** show significance at p <0.05, <0.01 and <0.001 respectively

5.6 Discussion

Several insights emerge from the analysis. Previous studies have examined the effect of different tweet features on retweeting, in some cases using non-brand tweets (e.g., Naveed et al., 2011; Petrovic et al., 2011) and in others, examining retweeting of brand tweets (Araujo et al., 2015; Burton et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014), as in this study. However, previous multivariate models examining the effect of tweet features have not tested for differences across products representing different levels of consumer involvement, despite strong theoretical arguments to suggest a difference, as discussed in the literature review. This research shows that consistent with theoretical and empirical evidence that consumers' involvement with a product category can influence their response to brand communications, tweets from high involvement brands were retweeted significantly more often than tweets from low involvement brands, after allowing for other predictors in the model. However, the effect of some tweet features varied across low and high involvement product categories, as we discuss in the following sections. In addition, the results suggest changing consumer responses to tweet features, in particular in consumers' response to interactive tweet features, reflecting the evolving nature of Twitter.

Most notably, the results show that after allowing for the control variables, only two independent variables - one textual (RetweetRequest), and one visual (Photo) had a consistent effect on retweeting across industries – in both cases positive, though non-linear for Photo. Earlier research has consistently highlighted the positive effect of retweeting requests (e.g., boyd et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2012), and these results show that effect is the same across industries representing different levels of consumer involvement. Our finding of a consistent positive effect of photos on retweeting contrasts with previous research that did not find an increase in retweeting for tweets that contained links to photos (Malhotra et al., 2012).

However, that research predated the ability to embed photos and/or video in tweets. Our finding that *embedded* photos were associated with a significant increase in retweeting suggests that technical evolution in Twitter (i.e., by allowing photos to display without a consumer clicking on a link) has resulted in increased response to photos. This positive effect of photos on retweeting across industries is in line with earlier advertising research that demonstrated the benefits of images in advertisements (Rossiter & Percy, 1980; Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991). This convergence between the effect of images in advertisements and in tweets may reflect that both communication channels push an image to the consumer, and thus increase the probability of a consumer response.

The effect of Hashtag (an interactive tweet feature) was also largely consistent across industries representing different levels of consumer involvement, with the sole exception being a non-significant effect of the linear term for Hashtag in the FMCG industry, albeit in the same direction. This result is not unexpected, since previous research has repeatedly demonstrated that tweets with hashtags are retweeted more often, on average (e.g., boyd et al., 2010; Suh et al., 2010). As a result, hashtags are very widely used, appearing in more than 70% of Auto and FMCG tweets (see Table 4). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no existing research that estimates minimum and maximum thresholds to identify the non-linear relationship between the number of hashtags and predicted retweet count. While the optimal maximum and minimum number of hashtags varied across industries, the results suggest that organisations may benefit from experimenting with different numbers of hashtags, and assessing the results.

The effect of another interactive tweet feature, URLlink, on retweeting was also largely consistent across industries, with inclusion of a URL link associated with a significant negative effect on retweeting in the full model and FMCG and Luxury industries, though a

non-significant effect in the Auto industry. In this case, however, the negative direction of effect is particularly interesting, since as discussed in the literature review, earlier studies have repeatedly found that inclusion of a URL link is associated with a higher frequency of retweeting (e.g., Naveed et al., 2011; Son et al., 2013; Suh et al., 2010). The reasons for the observed negative effect of URL links are not clear: some previous studies did not allow for the effect of other factors (e.g., Soboleva et al., 2015; Zarella, 2013), so methodological differences may explain these different findings. It is also possible that the evolution of Twitter, including the recent ability to embed content (such as photos and videos) within the tweet means that recipients of tweets may now be less likely to click on a URL link to reveal hidden content, and thus less likely to forward such tweets.

In contrast with the largely consistent results discussed above, there was notably less consistency across industries for other tweet features, and, in particular, significant differences across the two high involvement industries. Most striking, perhaps, is the effect of mentions. An initial mention had a significant positive effect on retweeting for Auto industry tweets, but a significant negative effect for Luxury tweets, and no significant effect for FMCG tweets. In contrast, a mention elsewhere in the tweet had a significant negative effect on retweeting for both Auto and FMCG industries, and was not significant for Luxury. Earlier studies have generally found that mentions decrease retweeting (Petrovic et al., 2011; Tan et al., 2014). However, previous research has not differentiated between effects of initial mentions and mentions elsewhere in a tweet. These results show that the effect of a mention is very different depending on its location in a tweet, but the effect is not consistent across industries. As discussed in the literature review, initial mentions can attract attention by making the mentioned Twitter handle (e.g., a person, possibly a celebrity, or a brand handle), the subject of the tweet. But within these two categories of person and a (non-person) brand,

there is also substantial variation; a mentioned person may be a celebrity, thus potentially increasing attention to the tweet, and consequently increasing the retweet rate, especially if strategic fit is present between that celebrity and a brand's product (Davies & Slater, 2015). (A tweet beginning with a Twitter handle name can also be a reply, including what has been called a 'public reply', but as discussed previously, there were very few public replies in the data, (35) and all replies were excluded from analysis since they are less likely to be retweeted.) A tweet commencing with a mention of a brand may refer to the brand itself, such as @Burberry's tweet (below) showing an image of its well-known check emblem, or may refer to an unrelated brand, such as @MercedesBenz' tweet (below) referring to a list of the best cars in the world by Top Gear (a well-known TV show):

.@Burberry trench coats have evolved over time but their check lining is still a signature feature http://t.co/lnFJytihZx (retweeted 216 times)

.@BBC_TopGear's "Best Cars In The World"? We've got a Coupé for that: benz.me/ynziDK/ http://t.co/wQAqxnw8e0 (posted by @MercedesBenz, retweeted 189 times)

The effect of mentions is therefore more complex than has been reflected in the literature to date. These results suggest that mentions can increase the number of retweets, if the mention is at the start of a tweet, as demonstrated by the significant effect of initial mentions for Auto industry tweets. However, this effect was not consistent across industries, and thus these results suggest that the effect of initial mentions merits further research. Such research could compare the effects of different types of initial mentions, for example, third-party mentions (i.e., celebrities or other brands) and self-mentions by brands.

The results for inclusion of the word 'please' were similarly inconsistent, being significantly positive in the Auto industry, marginally negative for Luxury, and not

significant for FMCG. However, these varying results are likely to be due to the low number of occurrences of the word 'please' (a total of only 27), in nearly all cases unassociated with a retweet request (which, as noted above, had a consistent and positive effect on the frequency of retweeting). As discussed in the literature review, there are theoretical reasons to suggest that adding the word 'please' to a retweet request may increase the retweet rate, though the very low use of 'please' by major brands in the context of a retweet request means that detecting any significant effect will require large samples to identify what appears to be, at best, a very small effect.

The final inconsistent (and surprising) result was the effect of inclusion of video (a visual tweet feature) in a tweet, which was associated with a significant increase in the number of retweets for the Luxury industry, but a marginal decrease for the Auto industry (and no significant effect for FMCG). Video sharing has become common in social media (Daggan, 2013), but as mentioned above, the ability to embed video is a relatively recent innovation on Twitter (Cooper, 2013). Reflecting its relative novelty, only one study to date appears to have analysed the effect of embedded video on retweeting, after allowing for other factors. That study found that the presence of video in tweets (of a US-based patient/health advocacy coalition) did not result in any significant increase in the retweet rate (Saxton et al., 2015). These results show that the use of video can result in an increase in retweeting, as shown here in the Luxury industry. However, the effect of video was not consistent, as shown by the marginal negative effect in the Auto industry and the absence of a significant effect in the FMCG industry. These inconsistent results for video are remarkable, given the additional richness in content offered by video (de Vries et al., 2012), and earlier evidence that animated banner ads appear to increase click-through intention and advertising recall (Yoo et al., 2004). It is possible that the varying effects of video are, like URL links, explained by the

evolution of Twitter. Like URL links, to play a video on Twitter, a user must click on a video to enable sound and watch it for some time, which requires sustained attention (Bruni et al., 2012). (Videos will usually commence auto-play as a user scrolls through their Twitter feed, but sound is not enabled and the video stops playing if the user continues to scroll.) It is also possible that video content with prominent logos may be perceived by followers as a form of advertising and as a result create aversion (Teixeira, 2012), making followers less likely to share brand tweets containing video. Finally, previous research suggests that videos that entertain and connect with consumers are re-shared more often than those with a utilitarian purpose (Yang & Wang, 2015), so Luxury tweets with videos may have been seen as more entertaining, and thus retweeted more often.

So what are the implications of these results for research and for marketing managers? In developing and testing a theoretical model to predict brand eWOM on Twitter, we provide important directions for research and for practice. For researchers, we extend previous research on Twitter, by showing how interactive and other tweet features increase consumer engagement with tweets, as measured by the frequency of retweeting. Consistent with research into the importance of consumer involvement, we show that retweeting is significantly higher in high involvement product industries, even though those who followed the low involvement brands in this study are likely to be more involved with the brand and/or product than a typical consumer. Building on previous research into different types of interactivity, we show that tweets (an interactive communication method) can be classified as to whether they contain interactive and/or textual features that can increase (or in some cases, decrease) the frequency of retweeting. We also show that the effect of some tweet features on retweeting is consistent across industries representing different levels of consumer involvement, while for other tweet features, the effect is inconsistent. So, consumer

involvement appears to have a significant effect on retweeting, but contrary to expectations, the effect of tweet features varied across industries, and was not consistent across the two high involvement industries. The reasons why are not obvious, and merit further research. However, the differences may relate to different uses of social media across and within industries representing different levels of consumer involvement. For example, as shown in Table 4, the two high involvement industries had very different levels of usage of some tweet features (i.e. Mentions and URLlinks). In addition, the effect of mentions on retweeting will almost certainly vary according to the interest of a brand's followers in the mentioned handle, and classifying mentions by who or what was mentioned, and attempting to determine follower interest in the mentioned handles, was outside the scope of this study. Understanding the reasons for across-industry differences is thus an area for further research, as we discuss below, but our model provides a framework for improved classification of tweet features, which should contribute to more accurate prediction of the retweeting of brands' tweets.

For managers, the results reveal a number of strategies for increasing retweeting of brands' messages. Though we controlled for the reach of tweets in this study, the results show that any strategy that increases the reach of tweets (e.g., increasing follower numbers and/or promoting tweets) is likely to increase the retweet count, and previous research suggests that an interactive, one-to-one and reciprocal approach may assist in establishing a larger follower base (Aleti et al., 2016). In contrast with findings that have suggested that only a small number of tweets per day – as few as three - is necessary (Lovejoy et al., 2012) and that more frequent tweeting does not result in a higher number of retweets (Mamic & Almaraz, 2013), these results suggest that a minimum number of tweets per day is required to increase the number of retweets (3, 5 and 6 tweets for Auto, FMCG and Luxury respectively).

Beyond the strategies to increase reach discussed above, the results show that tweet design can be used by brands to encourage – or 'seed' – retweeting of their tweets. As discussed above, inclusion of hashtags, photos and retweet requests was consistently associated with higher retweet rates across the three industries (albeit in a non-linear fashion for hashtags and photos). In contrast, inclusion of URL links and mentions (other than at the start of a tweet, where results were inconsistent) was associated with *lower* rates of retweeting. For initial mentions and video, the results were inconsistent across industries, so different brands may or may not benefit from including them in their tweets. So the results show that some tweet design strategies are likely to have a consistent benefit across industries, but that the effect of others is likely to vary across industries, suggesting that companies need to develop and test different approaches to maximise the likelihood of their tweets being retweeted.

5.6.1 Directions for further research

The results suggest several avenues for further research. Firstly, while the overall model showed that tweets sent by high involvement brands were significantly more likely to be retweeted, there were different predictors of retweeting across the two high-involvement industries, and these predictors were not consistently different from the low involvement FMCG industry. The reasons underlying this surprising finding are not clear, but further research comparing different product categories would be valuable to examine whether established classification of involvement predicts the behaviour of brand followers on Twitter.

The inconsistent effects of video on retweeting also merit further investigation, given the disparity in results across the three industries. Future research could benefit by

examining the different types of video included in tweets, to determine if particular types of video are associated with higher (and lower) rates of retweeting. Similarly, a closer examination of the content of photos in tweets may provide further insights into why brand tweets get retweeted. Finally, as discussed above, further research could investigate the largely unexplored area of initial mentions, and whether third-party mentions and/or self-mentions by brands are most effective in increasing retweet rates.

5.6.2 Limitations

As with all studies, there are limitations to the research. Firstly, the study only analysed Twitter activity by leading brands with large numbers of followers. These brands will all have high consumer awareness and large marketing budgets and teams at their disposal. The results may therefore not be applicable to brands with lower consumer awareness and smaller marketing budgets. The second limitation of the study relates to one of the control variables - the use of promoted tweets. While the study is one of the first to examine the effect of promoted tweets, we were only able to identify promoted tweets that were posted through Twitter's own advertising platform (Twitter for Ads). At the time of data collection, the vast majority of promoted tweets were posted through this platform, but it is possible that some tweets were promoted using other content management platforms, so our coding may not have identified all promoted tweets. While any associated under-estimation of the count of promoted tweets would decrease the power of the study to identify a significant effect in this area, it should not invalidate other results. Finally, the amount spent on promoting any tweet is not publicly available, so our estimation of the effect of promoted tweets does not allow for different levels of promotion. The study is also limited by what it did not assess: most importantly, due to the large number of tweets examined, we did not

incorporate tweet content (such as sentiment) beyond the inclusion of textual and/or the specified interactive features of the tweets. As well as the areas for future research discussed above, future research could extend this analysis by incorporating measures of tweet sentiment (e.g., negative, positive, neutral) and/or other measures of tweet content. The study also could not exclude the possibility that some of the retweets counted were sent by bots, though we have no evidence to suggest that this occurred.

5.7 Appendix

5.7.1 List of brands and Twitter handles examined

Brand	Twitter handle
Automotive industry	
Audi	@Audi
BMW	@BMWUSA
Chevrolet	@chevrolet
Ferrari	@FerrariUSA
Ford	@Ford
Harley Davidson	@harleydavidson
Honda	@Honda
Hyundai	@Hyundai
Kia	@Kia
Mercedes Benz	@MercedesBenz
Nissan	@NissanUSA
Porsche	@Porsche
Toyota	@Toyota
Volkswagen	@VW
FMCG	
Avon	@AvonInsider
Colgate	@Colgate
Danone	@Danone
Duracell	@Duracell
Gillette	@Gillette
Johnson & Johnson	@JNJNews
Kellogg	@KelloggCompany
Kleenex	@Kleenex
L'Oreal	@LOrealUSA
Nestle	@Nestle
Pampers	@Pampers
Luxury	
Burberry	@Burberry
Cartier	@Cartier
Gucci	@gucci
LouisVuitton	@LouisVuitton
Prada	@Prada
Ralph Lauren	@RalphLauren
Tiffany and Co	@TiffanyAndCo

5.7.2 Correlations and significance

	Retweet Count	Hashtag	URL link	Initial Mention	Mention	Retweet Request	Please	Cashtag	Photo	Video	LnFollowers	Promoted Tweet	Tweets Per Day
Retweet Count	1												
Hashtag	0.0188 0.0281	1											
URLlink	-0.0805 <0.001	-0.1183 <0.001	1										
Initial Mention	0.0044 0.6039	-0.0293 0.0006	-0.0451 <0.001	1									
Mention	-0.0104 0.2237	-0.0065 0.4452	-0.1527 <0.001	0.238 <0.001	1								
Retweet Request	0.0039 0.644	-0.0226 0.0082	-0.0449 <0.001	-0.0133 0.1196	-0.0424 <0.001	1							
Please	0.0051 0.5525	-0.0026 0.7585	-0.0193 0.0238	-0.0077 0.3698	0.0005 0.9492	-0.0034 0.6885	1						
Cashtag	-0.0256 0.0027	-0.0012 0.886	-0.0151 0.0763	-0.0138 0.1065	-0.0316 0.0002	-0.0062 0.4706	-0.0036 0.6776	1					
Photo	0.1877 <0.001	0.0701 <0.001	-0.2281 <0.001	0.0171 0.0457	0.0454 <0.001	-0.0426 <0.001	0.0089 0.2975	-0.0743 <0.001	1				
Video	-0.03 0.0004	0.0303 0.0004	-0.1675 <0.001	-0.0122 0.1548	0.012 0.161	-0.0155 0.0695	-0.0089 0.2956	-0.0161 0.0598	-0.1887 <0.001	1			
LnFollowers	0.2646 <0.001	-0.0123 0.1483	-0.0674 <0.001	0.0341 0.0001	0.0942 <0.001	-0.0319 0.0002	0.005 0.5597	-0.1084 <0.001	0.1676 <0.001	0.0882 <0.001	1		
Promoted Tweet	0.0855 <0.001	-0.045 <0.001	0.0213 0.0126	-0.0092 0.2816	-0.0543 <0.001	-0.0101 0.2353	-0.0058 0.4941	-0.0105 0.2185	0.0007 0.9392	-0.0177 0.0384	0.0505 <0.001	1	
Tweets Per Day	0.0167 0.0309	-0.2559 <0.001	0.168 <0.001	-0.0443 <0.001	-0.1917 <0.001	-0.0039 0.6513	-0.0137 0.108	-0.0463 <0.001	-0.2245 <0.001	-0.0846 <0.001	0.2096 <0.001	0.0242 0.0046	1

6: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the research findings from the four publications and discusses the contributions of the research. Limitations and suggestions for further research are also discussed. The final section provides concluding remarks to the thesis.

6.1 Summary of the Research Findings

The thesis provides a detailed analysis of how brands and a non-profit organisation are using Twitter for consumer engagement and stakeholder promotion. The objectives of the thesis were to identify factors associated with increasing consumer engagement, as measured by the frequency of retweeting, study Twitter communications within a network and provide advice on the theoretical and practical implications of using Twitter for marketing communications. The thesis has addressed these goals through four research studies.

The book chapter, presented in Chapter 2, showed how global brands are using Twitter through analysis of tweet features that they included in their messages, and how these features impacted on the frequency of retweeting of the brands' tweets. The study discussed what can be learned from the Twitter strategies of these brands, and the implications for smaller organisations. For example, the study recommends avoiding a broadcasting communication style and posting too many tweets, and instead suggests a focused approach to increase consumer engagement. This would involve crafting interesting and relevant tweets, possibly using a captivating call to action, mentioning influential people such as celebrities and referencing popular hashtags in tweets. Brands should also maintain separate Twitter handles for different purposes (e.g., keeping customer service communications separate from the central handle). The study also found that images and weblinks contained in tweets can be effective in making tweets appeal to followers and for driving more traffic to

the brand's website. Lastly, retweet requests were associated with increased retweeting, and provide an easy tactic by which smaller organisations may be able to increase the audience for their tweets.

Paper two, presented in Chapter 3, demonstrated how the Twitter use of an NPO and its network of corporate partners can be analysed to assess reciprocity within the network. The results showed much lower than expected levels of reciprocity between the NPO and its partners on Twitter. There was also no evidence of reciprocal promotion between corporate partners, which may be less surprising considering the novelty of the 'coopetition' concept. As discussed in that paper, Twitter enables coopetition efforts through co-branded and co-created communications using mentions and retweets. The limited evidence of such actions therefore suggests that both the NPO and its partners appear to have not adequately used Twitter to promote their own efforts and demonstrates that organisations need to advance their social media use, especially through the use of mentions and modified retweets.

The study contained in Chapter 4 extended the analysis of tweets that was undertaken in the paper in Chapter 3 in order to assess the evolution of the NPO's Twitter practice in relation to referencing their corporate partners. The results showed continuing limited recognition and reinforcement of the support of partners by the NPO. The findings indicate that the examined NPO (and potentially other NPOs) should use Twitter more strategically, as a minimum by acknowledging the support of their partners, as this form of communication can assist many of the objectives corporate partners seek, such as enhancing their reputation. This can be done in various ways, including directly asking consumers to patronise partners, and by modifying and then retweeting partner tweets. In addition, the results of the study suggest that partners should work closely with the NPO to show how

mutual value can be achieved, and if necessary help with the NPO's social media training in order to effectively leverage their financial support of the NPO.

The research presented in Chapter 5 showed that textual and other tweet design features can be used to predict brand eWOM on Twitter, as measured by the frequency of retweeting. However, the analysis demonstrated that retweeting is dependent on the level of consumer involvement. Different tweet design features can increase or decrease the frequency of retweeting, with some having consistent effects across industries (e.g., hashtags, retweet request and photos) and others producing inconsistent effects (e.g., video and non-initial mentions). These outcomes may result from different uses of social media across industries representing different levels of consumer involvement, which has not been previously studied. Thus, the model used in the research is the first to provide a framework for more detailed classification of tweet features and, as a result, more accurate prediction of the retweeting of brands' tweets.

6.2 Contributions of the research

The objectives of this thesis, as listed above, were to identify factors associated with increasing consumer engagement with brands' messages and study Twitter communications within a network of a non-profit organisation and its corporate partners. This was achieved by exploring organisational Twitter use and its evolution over a two-year period, with particular focus on brand electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and consumer and stakeholder engagement strategies. The results are important for understanding what organisations are doing, how their usage of Twitter is evolving, and what they can do to maximise favourable word of mouth and build their brands through co-branded and co-created communications on Twitter. The findings provide important contributions, as outlined below.

6.2.1 Contributions to theory

- This research is the first to compare and contrast differences in Twitter use by brands from three different industries (Auto, Luxury and FMCG). This is important because industries can reflect different types of consumer involvement. The results showed that the effect of tweet features on the frequency of retweeting varied across industries, in some instances reflecting the characteristics of high and low consumer involvement, and in other cases inconsistent with differences due to involvement. For example, tweets from high involvement brands were retweeted significantly more often than tweets from low involvement brands (unsurprisingly), after allowing for other predictors in the model. However, the effect of some tweet features such as mentions, videos and URL links varied across low and high involvement product categories. In addition, the research showed how organisations have changed their Twitter practices over the course of time, which highlights the importance of ongoing longitudinal research into marketing activity on Twitter. Thus, the research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that depending on the brand context, different industries need to use different communication strategies, and by showing that organisations need to adopt innovative approaches, in order to maximise positive eWOM on Twitter.
- The research is the first to develop and test a theoretical model that predicts eWOM on Twitter by assessing the effect of different tweet features on the retweet count. The research also provides an approach to estimate minimum and maximum threshold levels for some tweet features that can be used repeatedly in tweets (e.g., hashtags and photos) and, thus, have a non-linear effect on retweeting. The model helps to identify what works, and what does not work, on Twitter. For example, after allowing for

other factors, using the interactive tweet features of hashtags, initial mentions and photos consistently increased the retweet frequency of organisational tweets across industries. In contrast, using other interactive features, such as URL links and video had inconsistent effects on the retweet frequency. Consequently, the model helps to identify effective and ineffective practices on Twitter and a similar approach can thus be used by marketing practitioners to improve their marketing efforts on the platform, and by researchers to further investigate the impact of Twitter.

6.2.2 Contributions to practice

- The use of Twitter by organisations was examined in all four studies, with two publications focusing on the activities of a non-profit organisation and the other two examining how leading global commercial brands use the platform. The research thus provides evidence on how different organisations are using Twitter. The results show the different Twitter strategies being used by leading global brands and the factors that predict consumer engagement with organisational tweets. With respect to non-profit activity on Twitter, the research analysed communications within the network of an NPO and its different partner organisations, and identified how innovative approaches using Twitter could provide benefits for both the NPO and its corporate partners.
- The research is also the first study to show how Twitter can be used for reciprocal promotion, including co-branding and co-created communications and coopetition efforts within the network of an NPO and its corporate partners. The research examined the extent of reciprocity between an NPO and its partners through co-branded communications using mentions and retweets. Surprisingly, the research

found only limited use of Twitter in CSR partnerships, demonstrating the need for the NPO to use Twitter to successfully nurture their partnerships with donors. In response to this limited use of Twitter, the research identifies Twitter strategies that NPOs and their financial partners could use to provide reciprocal benefits.

6.3 Limitations of the research

As discussed in each of the publications, the findings of the research should be considered in the light of some limitations. Firstly, the research into commercial activity on Twitter was focused on leading global brands with large numbers of followers, and the results from Chapters 2 and 5 may therefore not be representative of and applicable for less well-known brands with smaller marketing budgets. In addition, for organisations examined only one central Twitter account for each brand was analysed, thus limiting the study of the brand's communication efforts on Twitter to the practices of the central organisational account.

The research in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 5 is also limited by what it did not assess - most notably, classification of tweet content by sentiment. Sentiment is an important aspect of any Twitter message, as it may influence the frequency of a message being retweeted. Thus, incorporating measures of tweet sentiment (e.g., negative, positive or neutral) in future research can provide important insights that will improve the effectiveness of Twitter communications. In addition, as noted earlier, Twitter is constantly updating and refining the functionality of its platform and, as a result, the practices and conventions that are common today may change as the platform and consumer behaviour evolve, thus requiring ongoing research in this area.

Finally, in analysing the activity of the non-profit organisation and its supporting partners, the research examined only one non-profit organisation and therefore it is possible that the findings cannot be generalised to other non-profit organisations.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

The thesis offers a number of areas for further research. Following the limitations discussed above, future research could examine how smaller brands communicate on Twitter, and how the platform is used by different industries for specific purposes such as customer service or as a channel to increase online purchase conversions. Such research would help to establish successful practices for companies with smaller human and financial resources and may uncover innovative uses of Twitter, especially in the light of its continuous updates.

Another area for further research is the analysis of consumer tweets about brands, in order to obtain further insights into what drives customer engagement on Twitter and how organisations can benefit from eWOM on Twitter. For example, previous research has demonstrated the consequences of customers sharing negative stories and inappropriate use of organisational hashtags on a company's brand and/or the success of a marketing campaign (Xanthopoulos, Panagopoulos, Bakamitsos, & Freudmann, 2016). Such incidents often can be counteracted by increasing the organisation's Twitter activity (e.g., Pfeffer et al., 2013). Future research could focus on ways to amplify positive consumer tweeting about brands to facilitate brands' presence and practices on the platform.

The final recommendation for further research stems from the fact that all of the studies examined organisational activity on Twitter, so future research could focus on other popular and emerging social media platforms to assess what types of posts are most effective on those platforms for different industries, and how reciprocal promotion can be enabled in

those environments. The most obvious example would be to analyse Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat activity created by organisations and compare and contrast these with tweets. Researching what happens on other platforms is also important in the light of the current challenges for Twitter in sustaining user growth due to increasing spam and instances of abusive behaviour that discourage some users (e.g., Singh, Bansal, & Sofat, 2016; Xanthopoulos et al., 2016).

6.5 Concluding remarks

With the use of social media channels like Twitter daily by many people, marketers need to continuously develop their communication practices on the platform. As shown by this research, organisations are able to influence and create eWOM on Twitter as well as build strong networks using reciprocal promotion with other organisations. As a result, this thesis makes a distinct contribution to the growing body of literature on Twitter practices and strategies through detailed analysis of the content of organisational tweets and their impact on retweeting and stakeholder management. The research has expanded on previous work on organisational communications on Twitter by proposing a model of the predictors of retweeting of brands' tweets, by analysing the effect of consumer involvement on Twitter communications through tweets from different industries and by examining the dynamics of communications on the platform within the network of an NPO and its partners. The thesis has also offered insight into the evolution of the use of Twitter by comparing practices over a two-year period. Understanding what organisations have done and what they can achieve on Twitter will be useful for both academia and industry, as organisations, in order to stay relevant, need to leverage social media to connect with consumers in an engaging way. It can be difficult to financially assess the benefits of being interactive on social media, but this research shows that a strategic approach to communication with consumers and stakeholders

on Twitter can lead to increased engagement with both consumers and other organisations, which can help organisations achieve a wider audience for their communications, build their brand and ultimately assist in accomplishing their goals.

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