

Extended Abstract:

Direct/Interactive Marketing Research Summit

Using Social Media Data to Understand Brand Development

Authors:

Kamer Yuksel, PhD Candidate, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Sergio Biggemann, Senior Lecturer, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Amit Sheth*, Professor, Kno.e.sis - Wright State University, Dayton, OH, USA

Jeremy Brunn*, Software Engineer, Kno.e.sis - Wright State University, Dayton, OH, USA

*We acknowledge partial support from the National Science Foundation (NSF) award: IIP 1542911: ``PFI:AIR - TT: Market Driven Innovations and Scaling up of Twitris- A System for Collective Social Intelligence". Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the NSF.

Using Social Media Data to Understand Brand Development

Today, the world is a deeply inter-connected place, with a broad array of social-actors (e.g. organizations, customers, and community members) interacting online. These interactions are often times enhanced, contextually and dialogically, with unique online capabilities such as image sharing, linking and tagging. Twitter, in particular, has emerged as a simple yet effective form of blogging, where social-actors engage using a limited number of characters (specifically, the “microblogs” are limited to 140 characters not including links and user handles). Some unique aspects of Twitter make it a particularly ideal platform for some brands to get noticed and become influential within the platform—given that their content is relevant and engaging. However, we know little about how organizations and other social-actors engage on social media platforms such as Twitter, and what constitutes an “engaging content”.

With these aims in mind, we trace a developing brand from its inception as a beauty/make-up focused online community site (www.beautylish.com), until its conversion to a social commerce site –between February 2010 and August 2012— with over one million community members. The selection of the time period is intentional, because it gives us a glimpse of what an engaging brand narrative would look like if a brand was not yet commercialized. In-depth interviews with brand managers revealed Twitter’s critical role during this phase; therefore, we examined all the tweets that could be identified through Twitter’s search media API, using Twitris in aid of the analysis. Twitris is a semantically-empowered social intelligence platform which offers unique capabilities for analyzing Twitter specific data, and adding different levels of contextual richness to analysis (Sheth et al., 2014).

We have conducted our analysis in three stages. First, raw data of 444,709 tweets was extracted from Twitter's search API for this specific time frame by starting a "campaign" on Twitris. Defining a campaign means using the appropriate keywords and constraints that lead to collecting relevant tweets. The data included organization's own tweets and other social actors' tweets which included the brand name in some context (referred to within the tweet or embedded within the link URL). Second, using the analytical capabilities of Twitris, the data has been organized around 16,218 topics (topic relevance of >5, monthly). Topics on Twitris represent noun phrases¹ (e.g. lovely on every complexion, Saturday night nails) that are extracted from raw data. Finally, we narrowed down and focused our analysis by qualitatively analyzing the most popular ten topics for each month –a total of 310 topics. The rationale to focus on the top ten topics is to better understand the engagements that contribute to brand development most.

Our interpretive process included both first-level (at the tweet level) and second-level (contents of link URLs) hermeneutical understanding (Llewellyn, 1993; Scott-Baumann, 2009). While the former revealed the structure of engagements (i.e. structural layers, processes and originator/source of engagements), the latter shed further light onto the narrative (e.g. socio-cultural references), style (e.g. inspirational/aspirational) and aims/goals (e.g. self-discovery) embedded in these engagements.

First-level interpretation revealed that the focal brand relies mostly on *selective interactions* (direct interactions with certain @user-handles) in the first half of its development. As such the organization locates and enthusiastically engages key actors (e.g. beauty enthusiasts) to initiate a

¹ These noun phrases are n-grams of 2-8, from which the largest n-gram is selected and any n-grams that are entirely contained within the larger phrase are filtered out. All of the largest n-grams for a tweet are kept and treated as individual topics.

conversation and a dialogue. This way, the focal brand introduces itself to the beauty community as a serious actor who wants to contribute. Also, what is striking throughout is the *lack of self-promotion*. We have not observed instances where the focal brand praises itself as reminiscent of traditional brand communications; instead, the promotion of the brand is done implicitly (e.g. RTs) or explicitly (e.g. extended meaning/relevance) by other social-actors whenever they share, highlight and/or endorse the brand or the brand content.

Critically, we found that co-creation of the brand narrative is a prevalent phenomenon on Twitter. Even though the top ten narratives are mostly company-originated, other social actors co-create the narrative by adding personal meaning/relevance (e.g. As Seen on TV Beauty Products That Work! | *Beautylish*: *Believe it or not, but I actually have bumpits, the second...* <http://bit.ly/w2bDIH>), to it or by extending its locus (e.g. #photography). The focal brand facilitates co-creation strategically through a formulated narrative that can readily be shared by social actors (e.g. I just voted 'Pretty plumageYAY' on 'Would you wear feather eye lashes?! Vote now ->), but more so, organically, through an *engaging narrative* that lend itself to various co-creative acts.

The interpretive process at the second level allows us to understand more about the latter, as we uncover an overarching theme which emphasizes beauty not as innate but as acquired through practice, shared expertise and fearless self-expression. Every brand narrative, therefore, reinforces this broader ideal, one way or the other. The focal brand shares beauty tips and how-to's as well as information about beauty products to address social actors' needs and concerns. But more importantly, the brand attempts to capture the essence of beauty (e.g. use of color,

posture/self-confidence) and changing-self (e.g. seasonal beauty), in ways that consistently foreground or elevate beauty above and beyond the mundane (e.g. as an artistic expression). It relies on socio-cultural markers (e.g. underground culture) and personal stories of key-actors (e.g. make-up artists) to inspire and empower. In this context, empowerment comes in many forms which make the case for self-discovery, self-expression and connecting with like-minded others.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Social-Actor Engagement, Brand Development, Critical Hermeneutics, and Twitris

References:

Llewellyn, S. (1993). Working in hermeneutic circles in management accounting research: some implications and applications. *Management Accounting Research*, 4(3), 231-249.

Scott-Baumann, A. (2009). *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*. London: Continuum.

Sheth, A. , Jadhav, A. , Kapanipathi, P., Lu, C., Purohit, H., Smith, G. A., & Wang, W. (2014). Twitris: A system for collective social intelligence *Encyclopedia of Social Network Analysis and Mining* (pp. 2240-2253). NY: Springer.