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# **Marketing with Twitter: Challenges and Opportunities**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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

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

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

### **Potential Benefits of Marketing with Twitter**

The large audience that can potentially be reached with Twitter makes it a very attractive tool for brands to interact with their customers. Twitter says that its research indicates that users want to hear from organizations on Twitter, as they typically follow five or more brands (Twitter, 2014b). Business executives are said to believe that Twitter has greater potential than other social

networks for delivering sales growth (Barnes & Lescault, 2013). Businesses have used Twitter to report financial results (e.g. Alexander & Gentry, 2014) and for firm disclosures in order to increase market liquidity (Blankespoor et al., 2013). Increasingly, however, Twitter is being used both for marketing (e.g. Burton et al., 2013; Yadav et al., 2013), and advertising (e.g. Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014; Lambrecht et al., 2014).

### Increased Audience Reach

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

### A Powerful Additional Channel

The growth of Twitter has meant that it has become an important part of the marketing mix for both B2B and B2C businesses (e.g. Swani et al., 2014). A Twitter presence generates exposure, can drive 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 et al., 2010). A number

of industry reports suggest that customer relationship management systems that integrate 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, 2013b). Interacting on Twitter is especially relevant for companies which 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 et al., 2014).

Twitter’s potential for rapid response and message propagation means 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 et al., 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 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.

## Engagement with Consumers and Word of Mouth

As more and more people sign up 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: 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 also become a platform that stimulates brand conversations (e.g. 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 positive 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 surges of outrage by activating existing fan networks (Pfeffer et al., 2013).

### **Monitoring and Responsiveness**

Listening in on social media can give an indication of sentiment towards a brand (Schweidel & Moe, 2014), and as discussed above, can provide a mechanism for responding to negative word of mouth. 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 in 2010, Air France-KLM used Twitter to communicate with 'huge waves' of customers (Kane, 2014).

### **Challenges of Using Twitter for Marketing**

Twitter also presents challenges for marketers, as we discuss in the following section. One recent industry research study 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). As with any other channel, brand communications on Twitter need to cut through the clutter of marketing communications, and need to do so in a way which is cost-effective for the brand. Below, we summarize three key challenges in marketing with Twitter.

#### **Rapid Evolution of Technologies**

Part of the challenge in marketing with Twitter is that the platform is constantly evolving. For example within the past year Twitter has introduced a range of innovations: embedded photos and/or videos within the tweet, so the tweet expands to show the content, rather than the user having to click a link to see the image, and thus leave Twitter (Cooper, 2014); '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) (Washeck, 2014). Twitter has also been said to be testing a 'buy now' button which allows users to pay by tweet, rather than repeatedly tapping to enter their card details on a mobile phone (Kuchler, 2014). These incremental changes in the way Twitter can be used could potentially have a significant impact on individual and organizational behavior on the platform. The evolution of Twitter features and the way that organizations are using Twitter are likely to make previous research and practice redundant, and thus require marketing managers to continually revise their marketing strategies to use Twitter most effectively.

### Potential for Negative WOM

One of the obvious challenges of using any social media for marketing is that social media have the potential to make even strong brands vulnerable due to consumer empowerment (Rokka et al., 2013). As discussed above, Twitter can be a valuable medium for positive word of mouth (WOM) propagation, but it also potentially exposes brands to negative commentary and complaints from consumers (Pfeffer et al., 2013). For example in late 2014 a tweet increased the attention to an incident where an NFL player was shown on video knocking his wife unconscious, followed by what was generally seen to be limited response from the NFL. Both Covergirl (a P&G brand and NFL sponsor) and the NFL became the subject of widespread criticism after a Covergirl ad of a model with the slogan 'Get your game face on' was photo shopped and tweeted showing the model with a large black eye (Richards, 2014). This form of negative WOM can be particularly damaging, because negative WOM appears to have 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 negative sentiment can increase propagation of tweets (Hansen et al., 2011; Naveed et al., 2011).

### Uncertain Return on Investment

Establishing the ROI of social media marketing is a well-known 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 networks (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, hashtags, or the time of the day the tweet is posted (Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2012). In addition, the effect of these factors is likely to vary according to the consumer's relationship with the brand and its offerings, so determining the best tweet strategy will never be easy.

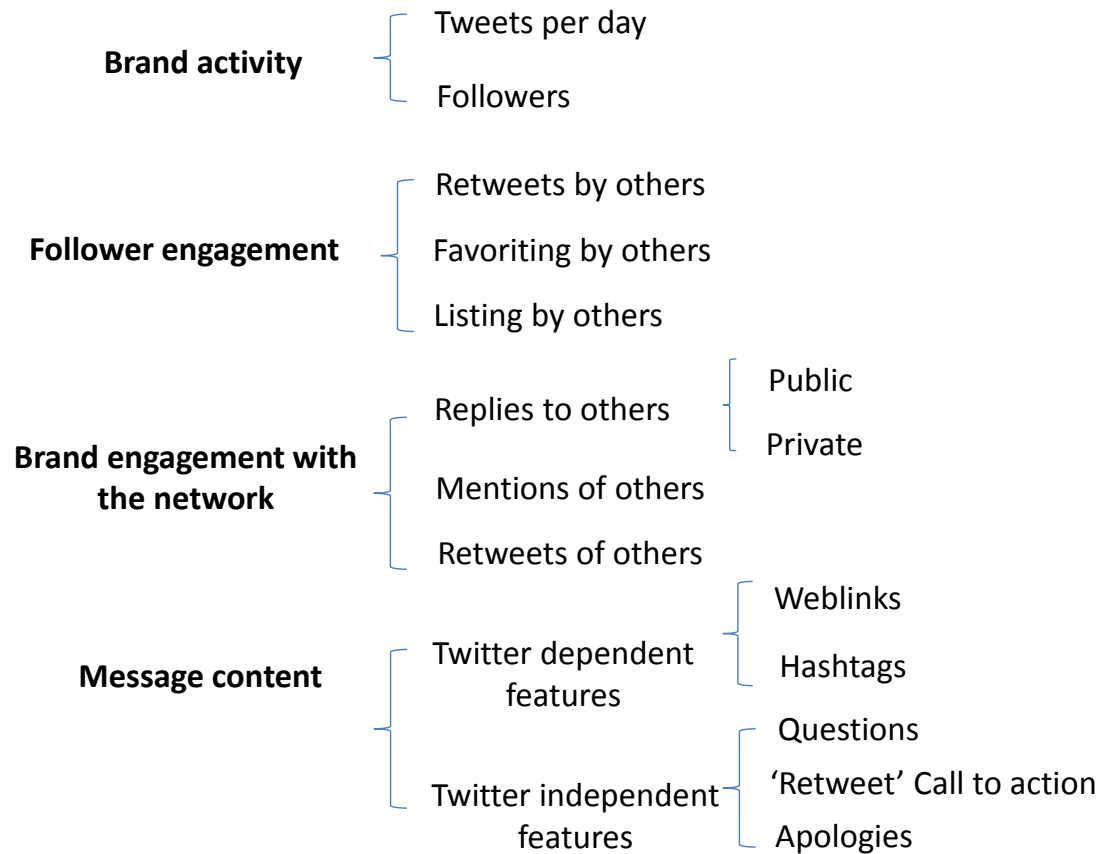
Despite the difficulties in establishing the ROI of Twitter use, there is some evidence that customers who use Twitter are likely to engage with a brand: Twitter says that its research reveals that 54% of consumers who use Twitter during primetime TV hours take action (such as visiting a brand's website) 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 (Heggestuen, 2013a). In the next section we therefore review potential measures of the success of Twitter communication, and discuss tweet features which can be used to increase customer engagement with a brand's tweets.

### **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 et al., 2013; Sterne, 2010). In the following section, we classify Twitter measures into four categories, as shown in Figure 1: 1) **Brand activity**, 2) **Follower engagement**, 3) **Brand engagement** with the network, and 4) features of the **Message content**.



Figure 1: Measures of Twitter success and activity



## 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.

### *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).

### *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.

## Follower Engagement

Given the problems of using follower numbers to assess 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., 2010). User engagement can therefore be assessed in three ways; by the frequency of retweeting, tweet favoriting and listing.

### *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 programmed to retweet (Ferrara et al., 2014), at least until robot handles are routinely used 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.

### *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 unlike retweeting, favoriting does not extend the reach of the tweet to the user's own network.

### *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 et al., 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 Twitter handle is listed is therefore an additional measure of user engagement with the brand.

## **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.

### *Replying to Others*

A brand's replies to other Twitter users (signified by a tweet which begins with '@' or '@.') reflect a direct conversation between the 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).

### *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).

### *Retweets of Others*

Users can also engage with the Twitter network by retweeting others’ tweets. As the name suggests, retweeting indicates interaction with other users, as well as a way to find out which tweets are seen as worthy of passing along (e.g. Ehrlich & Shami, 2010).

## **Message Content**

Tweet content can be evaluated for inclusion of features designed to increase user engagement. These features have been divided into Twitter independent and Twitter dependent features (Castillo et al., 2011). Twitter-dependent features include weblinks or hashtags, and Twitter independent features relate to the presence of punctuation marks (e.g. question and exclamation marks) and other linguistic elements signaling emotions and/or content. A very large number of tweet features can and have been coded (e.g. 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, and 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).

### *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, weblinks can now be used to embed photos and/or videos (using ‘Twitter Cards’), where instead of the user having to leave Twitter,

the tweet itself expands to show the content (Cooper, 2014). 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 to embedded content and those which direct the user to an external site.

#### *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.

#### *Questions*

Tweets can also be coded for the presence of linguistic elements 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.

#### *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 Marketing Cloud, 2012). 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.

#### *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.

### **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.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **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<sup>i</sup> 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 Twitter handle for each organization (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 1. Brands examined, number of followers and most frequently used hashtags

Twitter handle	Followers ('000s) <sup>1</sup>	3 most used hashtags (where >1)
<b>Auto</b>		
@Audi	884.0	#wantanr8 (68), #a3 (45), #quattro (38)
@BMWUSA	187.0	#bmw (227), #bmwbobsled (58), #bmwi8 (22)
@chevrolet <sup>2</sup>	503.0	#chevysxsw (798), #thenew (256), #purpleyourprofile (162)
@FerrariUSA	48.1	#ferrari (58), #ff (12), #tbt (11)
@Ford	527.0	#fordearnings (79), #fordmustang (50), #fordnaia (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)
@NissanUSA	402.0	#nissanniyas (51), #nissan (47), #namethatnissan (46)
@Porsche	657.0	#porsche (19), #porschemacan (11), #naia (7)
@Toyota	351.0	#letsgoplaces (69), #toyotaft1 (54), #noroomforboring (51)
@VW	307.0	#vwcares (273), #vw (122), #dasauto (32)
<b>FMCG</b>		
@AvonInsider	83.4	#fabin5 (89), #beauty (62), #nyfw (55)
@Colgate	11.1	#nodeforestation (17)
@Duracell <sup>2</sup>	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 <sup>3</sup>	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), #lorealafrika (31), #hacklorealpdp (29)
@Nestle	56.5	#nestle (137), #employment4youth (83), #wef2014 (48)
@Pampers	114.0	#pampersgameface (115), #pampersrewards (41), #pamperslove (34)
<b>Luxury</b>		
@Burberry	3,180.0	#burberry (218), #lfw (132), #lcm (78)
@LouisVuitton	3,810.0	#louisvuitton (166), #lvpass (27), #lvlive (25)
@Cartier <sup>4</sup>	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)

<sup>1</sup> Followers as of September 2014

<sup>2</sup> New to Interbrand list in 2013

<sup>3</sup> Excluded in 2014 due to low activity

<sup>4</sup> Excluded in 2013 due to low activity

## 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<sup>ii</sup>. 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 et al., 2013) so in this chapter, we focus primarily on the 2014 sample and on changes in activity from 2013 to 2014.

## **Measurements**

Details of how measures were calculated are given below:

### **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.

### **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.

### **Brand Engagement:**

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

Mentions of others: Mentions were also identified using a Microsoft 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 '@' 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.

### Message Content:

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

Twitter independent features: Questions, 'Retweet' calls to action and apologies were respectively identified using Microsoft 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 that 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'.

### 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, because 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, as some readers will be used to seeing them for comparisons between groups, and also 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  $\leq 0.01$ , report the exact value for  $p$  values between 0.01 and 0.05 without commenting on significance, and consider values of  $\geq 0.05$  as not significant, but report the size of  $p$  values between .05 and .1 to give an indication of the size of observed differences.<sup>iii</sup>

## 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) the impact of message content features.

## What are the Leading Brands Doing?

### Brand Activity

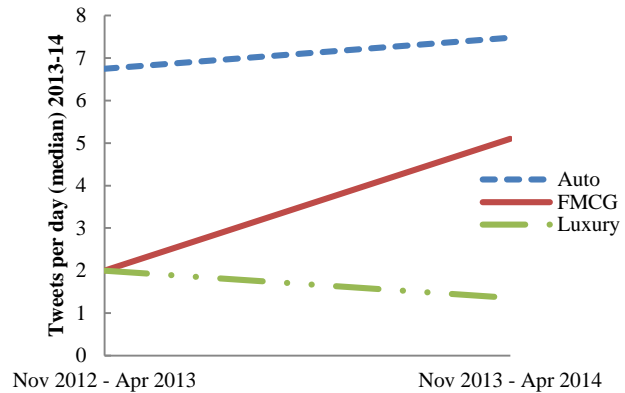
#### *Tweets per Day*

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. Tweets sent per day 2014

Tweets per day				
Industry	N	Mean	Median	Std
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. Change in tweets per day 2013-14



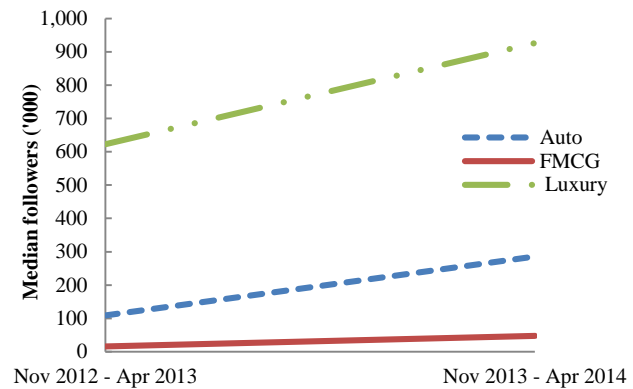
### Followers

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 unexpected 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 3. Number of followers 2014

Number of followers				
Industry	N	Mean	Median	Std
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 3. Change in followers 2013-14



## Follower Engagement:

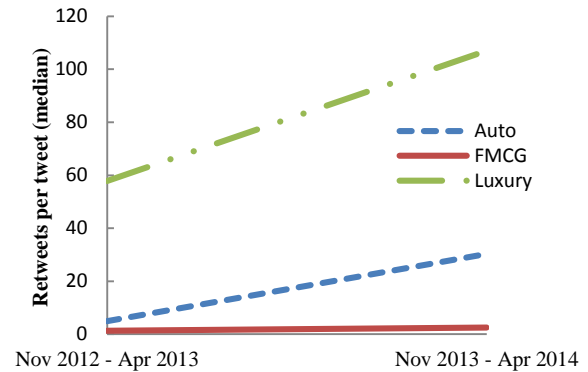
### Retweeting

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 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 4. Retweets per tweet 2014

Retweets per tweet				
Industry	N	Mean	Median	Std
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 4. Change in retweets rate 2013-14



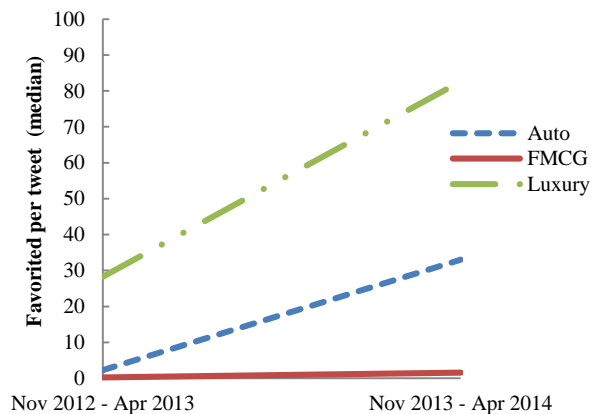
### Favoriting

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 5. Favorites per tweet 2013-14

Favorited per tweet				
Industry	N	Mean	Median	Std
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 5. Change in favoriting 2013-14

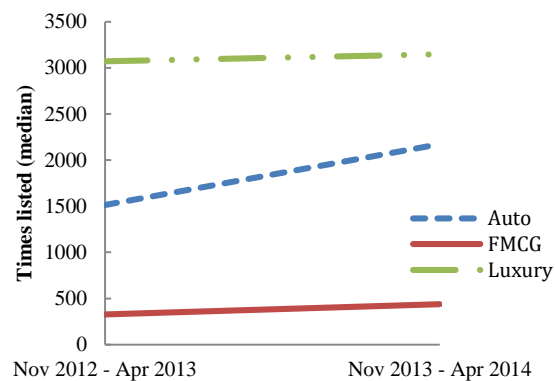


There were also significant differences in the frequency of listing ( $p < 0.001$ ), with both Auto and Luxury Twitter brands listed significantly more often than FMCG brands, but no significant difference in the frequency of listing between Auto and Luxury ( $p > 0.1$ ) (see Table 6). While non-followers 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 6. Frequency of listing 2014

Industry	N	Times listed		
		Mean	Median	Std
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 6. Change in listing 2013-14



## 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 much less frequently, since as discussed above, they are visible to fewer people.

#### *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.

#### *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, there was 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.

#### *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.

#### *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.

#### *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.

#### *Questions*

The most retweeted tweet in the 2013-14 period dataset (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%.

#### *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.

#### *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 examine the impact of ‘sorry’ on retweet rate.

Table 7. Tweet content and retweet levels

	Retweets with:		Retweets without:		Sig
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	
Public replies					
Auto	52	(188)	77	(287)	0.056
FMCG	5.0	(16.5)	7.5	(28.6)	ns
Luxury	136	(247)	182	(479)	ns
Mentions					
Auto	69	(159)	80	(333)	0.078
FMCG	6.7	(35.8)	7.8	(22.7)	ns
Luxury	191	(550)	174	(426)	ns
Weblinks					
Auto	82	(296)	21.0	(128)	< 0.001
FMCG	8.7	(34.3)	5.1	(11.2)	< 0.001
Luxury	189	(485)	33.0	(79.8)	< 0.001
Hashtags					
Auto	77	(285)	73	(280)	ns
FMCG	8.4	(33.0)	5.1	(10.3)	< 0.001
Luxury	181.0	(525)	178	(391)	ns
Question marks					
Auto	72.0	(427)	77	(252)	ns
FMCG	6.0	(31.3)	7.6	(27.7)	ns
Luxury	87.0	(164)	183	(479)	< 0.001
Retweet CTA					
Auto	677	(1803)	73.0	(254)	0.068
FMCG	36.7	(70.6)	6.8	(26.5)	< 0.001
Luxury	2576	(3113)	168	(378)	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.

## 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. Such 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 becoming more cost-effective. 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 – will usually be sufficient. Retweeting and favoriting are highly correlated, so including both 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 (e. g. 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 Superbowl 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. Thus, 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, focusing on 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.

## **Strategies of the Best Performers**

### **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), the Louis Vuitton handle decreased its engagement with 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.

### **Product Based Interaction: BMW and Audi**

Despite having only 20% of the followers of Audi (the Auto brand with the largest number of followers) the BMW Twitter handle 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. 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 Superbowl 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.

### 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 Superbowl 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.

### 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 through 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).

## Less Effective Strategies

### 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).

### 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 VW owners with problems to ‘Tweet #VWCares for assistance’ – thus directing them 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!”*

### 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, and appeared to 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.

## 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 suggestions 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, e.g.

*“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, 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 a brand's Twitter handle to the notice of the people mentioned – with the potential for them to follow and retweet the brand'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 Stars:

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

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 comparable appeal such as 'Favorite if...' could have similar results.

## Limitations

While the results provide insight into the Twitter strategies of leading consumer brands, they 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 awareness, so different strategies may be needed for less well-known brands, as discussed below.

## 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.

## **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 show 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 determine 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'd like to acknowledge the contribution of Frank Burton, who provided invaluable help in developing our Microsoft Excel coding schemes.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

1. 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 et al., 2004)
2. 'Embedded' content/media in tweets: photos or video that are 'embedded' show directly within Twitter, saving users from needing to click on the link to view the media.
3. 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 on the small star icon beneath the tweet. The star will turn gold, confirming that the tweet has been 'favorited'.
4. 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.
5. 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](http://www.interbrand.com))

6. **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').
7. **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.
8. **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>)
9. **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 the frequency of retweeting reflects the popularity of individual tweets.
10. **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](http://www.twitter.com/username)).

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<sup>i</sup> The terms FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) and CPG (consumer packaged goods) are often used interchangeably, with the term CPG more common in the U.S., and FMCG more common in Europe. The Interbrand report uses both terms, but more commonly uses the term FMCG, so we use that term throughout this chapter.

<sup>ii</sup> [www.twitonomy.com](http://www.twitonomy.com)

<sup>iii</sup> For readers who are not statistically minded, in our comparisons, a  $p$  value assesses the probability of obtaining a result as extreme as ours if there is no difference between the groups being studied (usually, between industries, or in some cases, in retweet rate between tweets with and without certain features). A high  $p$  value (by convention, described as 'ns' or 'not significant') provides little or no evidence of any (non-random) difference between the groups being studied.