



#StudentsofUrich

Occupy Social Media SI 110

Word Count: 2836

Bhagwagar, Somya

Somya Bhagwagar

Prof. Mark Newman

SI 110

04 December 2017

#OCCUPYING TWITTER

@STUDENTSOFUMICH

#ABSTRACT

Twitter is now a popular tool for social interaction and the exchange of information. This new medium of informal communication is commonly used for microblogging. In this project, an evaluation of Twitter was done from a first-time user's perspective by focusing on user interaction design. In order to do this, I created a blog account called "Students of Umich." After focusing on the design of the Twitter platform as well as on the technological impact on the individual, I found that though Twitter may be good for socializing with peers and potentially businesses, it does not do justice to blogs.

#INTRODUCTION

My most vivid memories of childhood involve following my mother through the farmers' markets on brisk Saturday mornings, captivated by colorful peppers and beans. However, this was only an extra incentive to our excursion. My mom and I share an interest in 'people-understanding' - taking the ideals of people-watching a step further by engaging with the workers and watching their eyes light up as they told us about their life journey.

When I first arrived at the University of Michigan, I was intimidated. Coming from a small town, I had never been around such a diverse crowd with insane amounts of talent. I found comfort in

engaging in conversation and going beyond small talk to find what people were about. I would ease people into conversations about their passions, and would always be elated when they would open up about everything from aspirations to struggles. Thus, Students of Umich was born. I created an Instagram and Facebook account, similar to Humans of New York, primarily focusing on the journeys of students as they chase their passions and become enmeshed in the university.

In SI 110, Professor Mark Newman discussed how social media creates a more connected society by breaking boundaries between different people of various cultures and regions. Social media has the potential to give a voice and allow people to understand each other better (Newman “Is Social Media Good for You?”). I learned that personal stories provide insight into each person’s unique struggles and character until they, ironically, become relatable. The stories give permission to humanize and empower not only the storyteller, but also the listener. Therefore, with the Occupy Social Media project, I wanted to expand Students of Umich to

Twitter (@studentsofumich) in order to not only empower students on campus but to allow other people to read these stories and connect with them.



Figure 1: Cat Smeal, Students of Umich

Twitter is one of the leading social media platforms, following Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram, with about 40% of teenagers and young adults using it as of February 2017 ("U.S. teens..."). Therefore, it has potential to mass communicate. It is also easy to link to Instagram and Facebook accounts.

Never having used Twitter before, I originally thought that the launch of this platform would reach followers who do not have a Facebook or Instagram account. One of my goals was to gain 150 followers on Twitter by the end of the Occupy Social Media project as well as to have interactions with the University of Michigan Student community. Interactions include tweeting, liking, commenting, or retweeting posts. My end goal with the entire Students of Umich project (with all platforms) is to show students that they are not alone in their struggles while highlighting the individuality and uniqueness of each one.

Figure 2: Students of Umich Page Description



To accomplish my goals, I planned to post roughly once a week and figure out the best tactics to share a story by using hashtags. I also linked this Twitter account to the Students of Umich Facebook page and Instagram account to spread the stories and keep them leveled (so that each story goes out at the same time on all platforms).

#METHODS

While using the Twitter platform, I created nine tweets. This approximates to about a tweet per week. The work that went behind each tweet involved finding students, easing them into conversations, and documenting these conversations with their quote and a photo which I took and edited. It is important to note that I was sure to obtain consent from the student for posting their photo, using their name, and tagging them in the post. This is the same formatting and process that I use for the other Students of Umich platforms. An example of a post can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Students of Umich Tweet
Example



"A lot of people think it's strange that my dream is to become an actress. I remember when I was twelve my Dad even told me that I was 'too smart' to be an actress and that it would be a waste of my potential. What those people don't understand is that everyone is going to be spending the next fifty years doing something. And it's either going to be something we're passionate about or something that just pays the bills. The one thing I know is that I'd sure as Hell rather spend fifty years doing something that I'm passionate about rather than waste that time sitting behind a desk writing up paper work for something I don't care about. Theater is what I love. And if you love something, you make it work."
~Emilie Helmbold

#GOALS

My goals of getting likes, retweets, and comments were successful as seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Quantity of Likes and Retweets on Twitter for Students of Umich

The tweets posted earned over 2.5K impressions. However, my attempt to gain followers was unsuccessful. By the end of the Occupy Social Media Project, I gained 32 followers as shown in Figure 5.

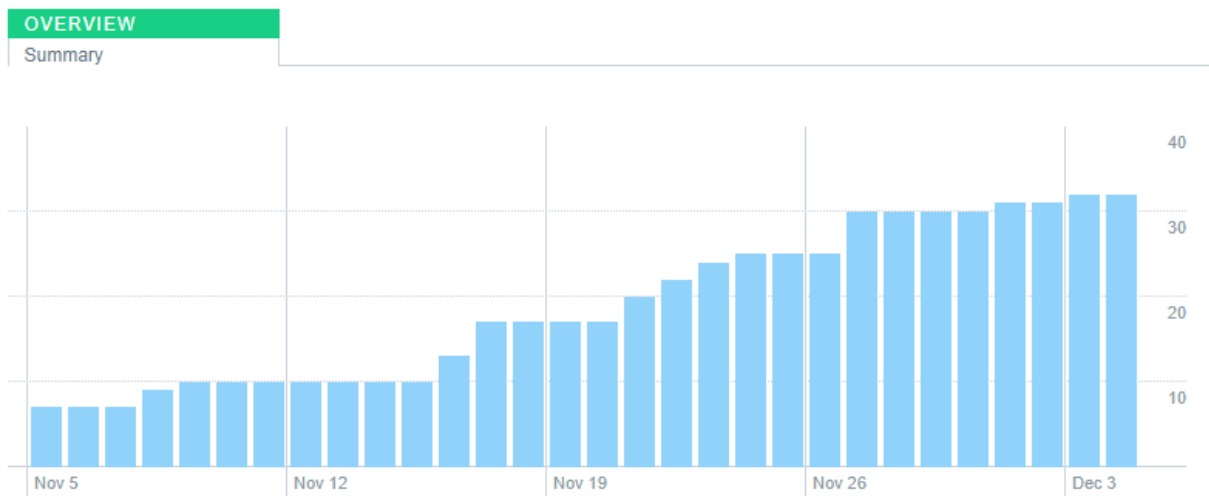


Figure 5: Students of Umich Twitter Follower Overview

After spending some time interacting with users on Twitter, I was finding it difficult to gain followers. I attribute this to the idea that many people are concerned about their follower-to-following ratio. According to a journal titled “The Impact of Network Structure on Breaking Ties in Online Social Networks: Unfollowing on Twitter” by Funda Kivran Swaine, Priya Govindan and Mor Naaman, a ‘follow’ on Twitter symbolizes a tie between two people. This is a set of contacts which reflects relationships of friendship, kinship, common interests, or new sources. However, the ratio of followers to following is a status symbol. Supposedly, someone who is more ‘popular’ will have a greater follower-to-following ratio. Therefore, without following other people on the Twitter account, it is very hard to gain followers.

As a blog account, I was also looking for a respectable image and did not follow many people. After experimenting with different tactics to gain followers, I soon found that in order to increase interaction, it was better to tag students in their photo and join lists online that would share or retweet my tweets.

Due to problems which will be discussed in the next section, I was unable to use hashtags and tag people to manipulate the algorithms. This may have been one of the reasons why I had an overestimation for followers.

I found the goal of obtaining 150 followers difficult and soon realized that since it was not entirely in my control, it was not a feasible goal. I therefore spent my time trying to post at least one tweet per week and like at least four tweets per week in order to interact with other Twitter users.

#PROBLEMS

I originally intended to use Twitter as a third platform where I could post the exact same content as both my Facebook and Instagram accounts. However, I found this to be difficult and can conclude that Twitter is not meant for the style of blogging which I am doing. This can be seen in the several problems that I encountered throughout the process of occupying social media.

How Do I Tweet?:

The Twitter interface on the desktop is different from the interface on the iPhone app. On the desktop interface, there is a blue button in the corner that says 'Tweet.' It is easy to figure out how to make a post. However, most of my photos are edited on my phone, so in order to be productive, I needed to figure out how to create a tweet on the iPhone interface.

The icon for creating a tweet on the iPhone is shown below in Figure 6. Though the difference may seem trivial, as someone who was never previously exposed to Twitter, I could not figure out how to tweet from my phone. After doing a quick Google search, I was able to compose a tweet.

I am sure that if I struggled with figuring out how to tweet, some other users have as well. In comparison to other social media sites such as Facebook or Instagram, the option to compose a message is more hidden.



Figure 6: Twitter Post Icon

How Do I Edit a Tweet?:

Throughout the allotted time of the project, there was a common theme. As soon as I tweeted, I would realize that I forgot something: a hashtag, tagging someone, quotation marks around a quote, etc. After doing another quick Google search, I found that it is impossible to edit a tweet. There is no feature in Twitter to do this. Every time I messed up, I had to delete and redo the composition of the tweet.

What Is a List? :

Shortly after I started tweeting more routinely, one of my followers, Alumni of Umich, added me to a list called “UMich-relevant Tweeter” as seen in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Students of UMich was added to a list

After doing another Google search, I found that a list is simply an organized group of Twitter accounts for a specific purpose. This allowed me to become more well-known in the University of Michigan community since the people in this list were automatically subscribed to my content. This list had 32 members, all of whom were related to the University of Michigan in some way. It was like a little community within Twitter, as seen in Figure 8.

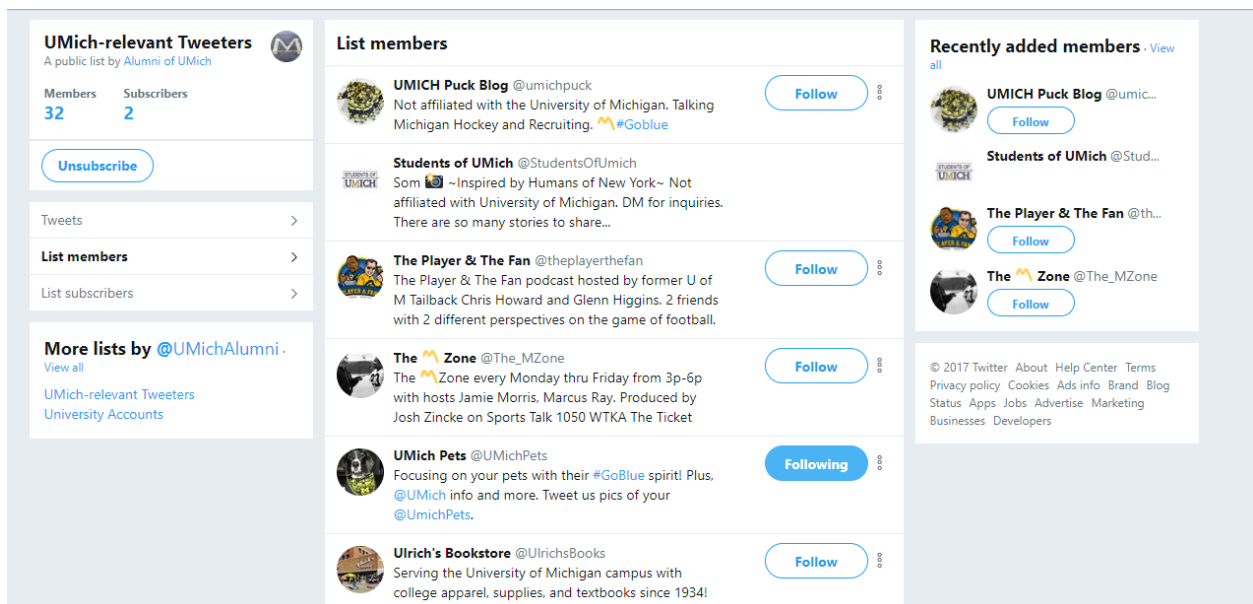


Figure 8: UMich- relevant Tweeters List

The Concept of Microblogging:

Microblogging is the combination of instant messaging and blogging which allows a user to create short blogs to be posted and shared instantly. The trend of microblogging came during the Web 2.0 era when social media and blogging merged to create a faster and more productive form of communication online (Nations). Microblogging has become useful in the Internet realm.

Therefore, Twitter has placed a 140-character limit on tweets. According to Bharath Sriram in “Short Text Classification in Twitter to Improve Information Filtering,” this is put in place to prevent users from getting overwhelmed by information.

This is great for solving the problem of information overload to the user, but can decrease amount of content. It is hard to document a story with the correct details with a limited word count. An interviewed student cannot connect with a reader in under 140 characters. Details are essential in a story for the reader to connect. Therefore, Twitter is not meant for storytelling in the way that I have used this platform.

To maneuver around the character count, I had to edit all of the photos so that the text was in the photo itself and not in the tweet. This was a tedious task which also prevented me from being able to link the Twitter account to my Facebook and Instagram platforms since I had to create a new photo for Twitter.

Mentioning Users:

Another problem which followed the character count: the characters used to mention people are included in the character count. Therefore, if someone has a long twitter handle, it takes away from the amount of characters I have left for content. I found that if I wanted to hook the reader to look at the photo with the quote, I needed a strong message in the Tweet. Due to my personal

standards, I did not find it appropriate to cut down words from a quote. This would be manipulating the words of the student, even if only slightly. In order to get a whole sentence in the message composition, I had to find other ways to tag the student. This meant that rather than mentioning them in the message, I had to tag them in the photo.

Using Hashtags:

Hashtags are also included in the character count. I found myself making a tradeoff between keeping the integrity of the quote and manipulating algorithms to get more views on my tweet.

#DISCUSSION

With these problems encountered- whether they were small problems of having to Google how to perform an action or big problems such as having to re-work my process of tweeting due to the character limit- there were two common themes.

User Interaction Design:

The minor issue of having to Google how to perform an action is related to the user interaction design. Interaction design involves "...designing interactive products to support the way people communicate and interact in their everyday and working lives" (Preece, Rogers, and Sharp). The major design principles include visibility, constraints, feedback, affordances and consistency.

Twitter has some areas that it needs to improve on from a first-time user's perspective.

The idea of visibility is that the actions should be visible. A problem that arose due to lack of visibility and consistency (on the website design in contrast to the phone application) was the button to compose a tweet. Since it was very small and white in the top right corner of my

screen, my eyes were not drawn to the button. Composing a tweet is one of the most important actions on Twitter and therefore should be salient.

Constraints in design principles limited the opportunity for the user to make an error. In the case of Twitter, there is no option to edit a tweet. In reference to not being able to edit tweets, Casey Newton wrote in “The Case for Editing Tweets”, “God forgives; Twitter doesn’t” (Newton).

The feedback design principle denotes that the users are informed of the results of their actions. In the dilemma of not knowing what a list was, I was not informed of the results of action of me being added.

There are several design principles that could be worked on in order to create a better user experience while tweeting. The lack of these specific principles does not create the right atmosphere for blogging. Blogging is about expressing thoughts and feelings and it is hard to do so under the constraints of not being able to go back and edit a tweet.

Divided Attention

When Marshall McLuhan published *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, he declared that the electric media was “breaking the ruling of text over thoughts and senses” (Carr 1) and that the technological simulation of consciousness and knowledge about a given subject will be extended to our society. During the time his book was published in 1964 there were both enthusiasts and skeptics about the impact of the Internet and the different mediums through which information travels. However, McLuhan made a bold statement that “the medium is a message” (Carr 1). This is unusual because most people debate about the content every time the medium advances rather than the medium itself- which is what truly influences how we act and think.

Twitter is a medium that has shortened the attention span of many people. It is designed for a convergent thought. If the medium is the message, then Twitter is not supportive of storytelling. With the features imposed, especially the character count, it is difficult to continue this blog on the platform. The limit forces me to re-edit all of the images in order to add the stories as text, does not permit me to use hashtags or mention people, and constantly forces me to choose between playing with Twitter algorithms or keeping the integrity of the quote by not shortening it.

#CONCLUSION

I ended the Occupy Social Media project with a total of nine tweets, 32 followers, six following, 24 likes and one list. I received a total of over 2.7k impressions, 580 profile visits, and one comment on my page. This site is a good medium for communicating small bits of information to large audiences. The norm for tweets is to have a short one-liner or a link to an article or photo. It does not do justice to blogs. Though it was difficult to gain followers, I found it easy to get involved with the community and increase engagements on my post. However, I was not elated with the content that I was producing. The engagement in the site enhanced my realization of the value of details. Throughout the OSM project, I became protective of every detail that went into a story and felt that in blogs, a connection to the reader is essential. Therefore, I do not think Twitter is the right platform to continue Students of Umich. Once this project is over, I will delete this account and stick to the Instagram and Facebook platforms.

#studentsofumich #occupysocialmedia #donewithtwitter #followusoninstagram #micdrop

Work Cited

Carr, Nicholas G. *The shallows: what the Internet is doing to our brains*. New York, W.W.

SNorton, 2010.

Kivran-Swaine, Funda, et al. "The impact of network structure on breaking ties in online social networks." *Proceedings of the 2011 annual conference on Human factors in computing systems - CHI 11*, 2011, doi:10.1145/1978942.1979105.

Nations, Daniel. "Here's What the Term 'Microblogging' Really Means." *Lifewire*,
www.lifewire.com/what-is-microblogging-3486200.

Newman, Mark. "SI 110: Divided Attention.", 21 September 2017, IN. Lecture.

Newman, Mark. "SI 110: Is Social Media Good for You?.", 19 September 2017, IN. Lecture.

Newman, Mark. "SI 110: User Experience Design.", 12 October 2017, IN. Lecture.

Newton, Casey. "The case for editing tweets." *The Verge*, The Verge, 13 Apr. 2017,
www.theverge.com/2017/4/13/15278800/edit-tweets-twitter-hysteria-nihilism.

Preece, Jennifer, et al. *Interaction design*. Apogeo, 2004. 2-35. Print.

Sriram, Bharath, et al. "Short text classification in twitter to improve information filtering." *Proceeding of the 33rd international ACM SIGIR conference on Research and development in information retrieval - SIGIR 10*, 2010, doi:10.1145/1835449.1835643.

"Twitter Analytics." *Twitter*, Twitter, analytics.twitter.com/user/StudentsOfUmich/home.

"Using Twitter lists | Twitter Help Center." *Twitter*, Twitter, support.twitter.com/articles/76460.

“U.S. teens: most popular social media apps 2017.” *Statista*,

www.statista.com/statistics/199242/social-media-and-networking-sites-used-by-us-teenagers/.