SPOKES-CHARACTER USAGE

AS A MARKETING TOOL

ON TWITTER

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how marketers use spokes-characters on Twitter to communicate with consumers subscribing to the character's Twitter feed. This research content analyzes Twitter posts for 20 spokes-characters representing a variety of brands and different product categories. A random sample of 2,691 tweets were selected to be analyzed for content, links, and timing. The results proved several relationships between different spokes-character demographics and their tweeting habits. When compared to male characters, female characters are significantly more likely to tweet original content, while males are significantly more likely than females to respond to queries. The most frequently tweeted type of content for all characters is pass along content, with news being the least frequently observed content category. Significant content differences are observed between spokes-characters based upon the spokes-character's gender, appearance and product type represented. When all characters are considered, most spokes-characters tweet during weekday mornings. Similar patterns are observed for monthly tweet activity: tweet frequency peaks in the summer, and declines during the October, November and December.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped me through the ups and downs of this research project. Most importantly I dedicate this to my family and friends who always supported me and my academic career.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine how brand spokes-characters are being used as marketing tools on Twitter. With the recent emergence of social media, many marketers scrambled to use these media to deliver brand messages to interested consumers. However, in the hurry to become relevant many marketers did not utilize social media's full potential. This study will look at 20 popular brand spokes-characters, with active Twitter profiles to see how different companies are using social media to interact with consumers. This study will include both traditional spokes-characters (The Jolly Green Giant and Charlie the Tuna) as well as newer ones (Flo and Ms. Green M&M) to see which types of relationship building strategies, if any, are being used by different types of characters.

Twitter allows brands to extend the personality of their spokes-characters, introduced through marketing and advertising, via direct interaction with consumers. Social media gives marketers the opportunity to respond to their consumers' questions and concerns as well as show the brand's relevancy through comments on current events and popular culture. Consumer brand relationships can evoke the same emotions as interpersonal relationships if the relationship is properly maintained. If spokes-characters and brands interact with consumers as is the characters were real people, consumers are more likely to respond in an equally human way (Fournier, 1998).

According to Fournier's (1998, 1994) research on consumer brand relationships, spokes-characters should be using Twitter as a way to extend their

1

personality and create more consistent, effective branding. This research will determine if brands are following Fournier's advice by interacting with the consumers and producing material that can't be seen in traditional advertisements.

There is a need for this research since there is no research looking at spokes-characters content specifically on Twitter. This will further knowledge in the field by showing marketers how spokes-characters are being used on Twitter. Chapter Two contains relevant literature on spokes-characters, consumer-brand relationships and Twitter behaviors. This chapter also contains the research questions to be answered with a content analysis of characters' Twitter postings. Chapter Three discusses the method used to conduct this research, while Chapter Four presents the results of the content analysis. Chapter Five discusses the conclusions and implications of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spokes-Character Literature

Establishing a Spokes-Character Typology

       For the purpose of this study, a spokes-character is defined as a recurring fictional persona with a distinct personality that is created to represent a product or a service. The words "fictional persona" are key, including animated characters (Energizer Bunny for Energizer Batteries) as well as human actors portraying spokes-characters (Flo for Progressive Insurance) as long as they are fictional. Spokes-characters differ from spokespeople: spokespeople are humans speaking on behalf of a brand. Spokes-characters are invented characters with unique personalities and images promoting a brand. This study will consider non-celebrity characters only since these characters are created specifically for brand advertising.

       In 1995, Callcott and Lee created a spokes-character typology named the "AMOP Framework." This was derived from a content analysis of over 700 ad character images. The AMOP Framework looks at character appearance, medium, origin and promotion. Under appearance, spokes-characters are defined as either fictitious humans (illustrations, caricatures or actors) or non-humans (animals, mythical characters or product personifications). Medium classifies spokes-characters in regards to which medium or media the character is observed in, such as print, film, radio or merchandise. Origin separates characters into two possible groups based on origin: advertising (non-celebrity) or non-advertising (celebrity). The final factor, promotion, differentiates between active engagement (speaking for

or demonstrating the product) and passive engagement (symbolic representation). In order to prevent characters from "wearing out," many characters have switched between active and passive roles. For example, Charlie the Tuna is an example of a fictitious, non-celebrity, non-human spokes-character. He has been the spokes-character of StarKist Tuna since 1961. He appears in many different media and throughout his existence has alternated between active and passive roles. Following short hiatuses, Charlie has made two notable returns, one in 1999 and one in 2011. In addition to new commercials, 2011 also brought about a new slogan, "Thanks, Charlie," and a social media presence to bring new life to this old and iconic spokes-character (Starkist.com).

To be considered an advertising character within the AMOP framework, Callcott and Lee (1995) list two necessary conditions: "First, a character must be used consistently in conjunction with the product it advertises…Secondly, the spokes-character must have a recognizable 'character' or 'persona'…This means that an image must have an explicit personality or nature that is easily perceived by consumers," (p 146). In 1999, Phillips and Gyoerick added product type (high vs. low involvement), gender and ethnicity to the AMOP Framework in order to provide a more detailed description of spokes-characters.

Advantages of Spokes-Character Use

When compared with celebrity spokespeople, spokes-characters have several advantages. First, celebrities can be overexposed and have brand/spokes-person inconsistencies that confuse the audience and dilute the message. A stronger advocate/brand personality correlation leads to a stronger product recall (Callcott

& Lee 1995). Callcott and Alvey (1991) found that non-celebrity characters generated a 71.8% product recall level while celebrity endorsers only generated a 28.7% product recall level. Second, spokes-characters are more predictable. Celebrity spokespeople may make mistakes and become associated with negative information that could hurt a brand. Spokes-characters are a safer alternative because they can be "controlled in ways that human endorsers cannot," (Stafford, Stafford & Day 2002, p18). Because the Geico Gecko is under full control of Geico's marketing team, brand managers never worry about suffering backlash from a scandal such as Nike suffered with Tiger Woods.

With spokes-characters, marketers have the ability to create the personality and appearance of the character specifically to fit their brand. Instead of having to choose from already established personalities and images, spokes-character creators are able to create specific behaviors, actions and appearances for the character. Over time, characters come to represent brands and in some cases even become the brand (Callcott & Alvey 1991). For example, *Ad Age* when talking about Ronald McDonald, stated, "He doesn't sell for McDonald's, he is McDonald's" (Top 10 Advertising Icons, 1995). Rossiter and Percy (1987) suggested that animated spokes-characters provide a visibility hook for the brand. The image of the character acts as a memory cue when consumers are choosing products and aids in brand identification. Chances of increased brand identification are particularly high when characters are integrated into all branding tactics (advertising, packaging, displays, promotions, etc.) (Rossiter & Percy, 1987).

Animated spokes-characters live in a fictional world and therefore can "create a world of fantasy for a product in a way that makes puffery palatable. Cartoons can get away with doing and saying things that real (live) people cannot," (Baldwin 1982, p96). This gives advertisers for companies of "taboo product areas, such as digestion and excretion" a way to explain their product without being graphic or awkward (Callcott & Lee 1995, p146). For example, Mucinex is a nasal decongestant and mucus thinning medication. Instead of describing the product's features, the brand created Mr. Mucus and family to add humor to the brand's advertisements. The ads depict the family moving in one's nose or lungs and panicking when realizing their host has taken Mucinex to kick them out. Mucinex ties it all together with their slogan: "Mucinex In. Mucus Out."

Baldwin (1982) also states that people tend to "suspend disbelief and enter into the spirit of things in the animated world," (p96). In other words, if both a real person and spokes-character made the same product claim, people would be more likely to believe the spokes-character. Baldwin gives the following example, "When a little old cartoon lady says the Green Giant cooks a better dish than she does, the viewer 'accepts' this claim as one of 'better than average.' If a real old lady held up a package and said, 'This is better than my homemade,' her claim would very likely be rejected," (p96). People are open to and enticed by the simple fantasy worlds that spokes-characters create and live in as much as they are the characters themselves.

Spokes-character Likability

Callcott and Phillips (1996) determined four dimensions of character likability: personality, physical characteristics, humor and consumer experiences.

The first three are controllable, while the fourth is harder to manipulate and measure. Consumers greatly prefer characters with a distinct personality and do not like characters without one. They liked characters whose personality was unique to the character while also reflecting the brand the character endorsed. In terms of physical characteristics, consumers preferred "cute" characters (Pillsbury Doughboy or Scrubbing Bubbles) with miniature props (Keebler Elves' outfits and treehouse) and a contemporary appearance. Respondents disliked characters that seemed old-fashioned such as the Jolly Green Giant and Mr. Peanut. Humor was also deemed very important, though the type of humor made little difference. These three aspects together lead to the fourth character dimension, customer experience. Customers' experiences with a spokes-character throughout the customer's life lead to nostalgia, stereotypes and brand attitude effects.

The more a person likes an advertisement or some of its elements (music, spokes-character, humor) the more likely they are to remember the ad and be persuasively impacted (Callcott & Alvey 1991). Consumers favored brands connected to the characters they liked (Callcott & Phillips 1996). Phillips and Lee (2005) found likeability is the primary contribution of a spokes-character. Likeability positively influences attitudes about advertisements as well as attitudes toward the brand. If a person likes a spokes-character, the ad has a greater chance of attracting and maintaining a consumer's attention. Garretson and Niedrich (2004) further explored the relationship between spokes-character use and customer response and created a conceptual model. Garretson and Niedrich believed that

character expertise, relevance and nostalgia worked together to form character trust. This character trust would lead to brand attitudes, or likability.

Spokes-character Interaction

When moving a spokes-character from traditional media to the Internet, interactivity becomes key in creating consumer response and perception. Research demonstrates animated characters enhance entertainment value, which can lower the perceived level of difficulty of on-line tasks (Dehn 2000; Moreno et al. 2001). Critics of animated characters argue that some entertainment aspects can distract users from learning information or completing their original tasks (Dehn 2000). Moreno (2001) found that students exposed to animated characters learned better than students not exposed to the character. However, this was only if the students were allowed to interact with and respond to the character.

Phillips and Lee (2005) analyzed spokes-character use on 36 corporate websites. While these websites did contain an image of the spokes-character, most did not take full advantage of the character's capabilities. The characters were treated more as print ads and did not interact with the consumer. The vast majority of the spokes-characters (97%) were pictured as silent, still images taken from other promotional materials and 70% did not engage with the product in any way. Slightly more than half (56%) of websites depicted at least one animated version of their spokes-character. Phillips and Lee's research found that adding animation to the character increased the liking for the character as well as the website. They did note that adding a voice to the animation did not significantly increase liking effects. Tests also showed that respondents perceived a more social presence on websites

that allowed them to play a game and interact with the character as opposed to sites with no interaction opportunities.

Liao et al. (2011) experimented with undergraduate students to see how interactivity with a spokes-character would affect brand attitude. They created a new alcohol drink and a corresponding spokes-character (Nana) to promote and the brand. Subjects in the treatment condition were shown a two-and-a-half-minute video with the spokes-characters and asked to return later that week. Upon returning, half had further interaction with the character and half did not. Liao found more positive brand attitudes among the group that interacted with the character. When interviewed, students said they felt a friendship with the character while filling out the questionnaire. This relationship made it harder to respond negatively about the product. Students said they all knew that Nana was not a real girl but still felt guilty when answering in a way that might hurt her feelings. This suggests that spokes-characters, if used properly, can be strong marketing tools. If consumers begin to interact with a character as a social being, over time consumers can begin to feel an emotional connection with the spokes-character that can move from the character to the brand the spokes-character represents.

Consumer-Brand Relationships Literature

Brand Relationship Quality Construct

Fournier (1994) created a scale to determine brand relationship quality (BRQ). It is a customer-based measure of the "strength and depth of a consumer

brand relationship," (p124). If a brand relationship is considered high quality, it means the association between the consumer and brand is capable of further development and prosperity. This construct not only indicates satisfaction and loyalty but identifies "the sources that contribute to the quality of the relationships," and further "[highlighting] areas of strength and weakness," (p150). This allows both parties to analyze and maintain the relationship. There are seven interrelated dimensions assessed by the BRQ scale: personal commitment, love, passionate attachment, self-concept connection, nostalgic connection, intimacy and brand-partner quality.

Personal commitment is the loyalty a consumer holds to a particular brand. This can also be the feeling of guilt some consumers have when terminating brand use. Marketers can strengthen the loyalty factor by introducing exit barriers and sunk-costs investments. Love is a reflection of the emotional or attitudinal feelings consumers have towards the brand as a relationship partner. Passionate attachment "reflects the extent to which the brand is ingrained in the consumer's course of daily living: both behaviorally (through the frequency, scope or strength of actual activities) and cognitively, as with thoughts of preoccupation, longing or fascination" (Fournier 1994, p166). The degree to which a consumer is attached to a spokes-character is determined through interaction patterns as well as the amount of separation anxiety experienced during lack of brand-consumer interactions. Self-concept connections are the "bonds that formed between the brand and the person's current (real or ideal) self concept or image," (p137). Nostalgic connections are the connections created between a brand and the consumer at an earlier time that are

stored in the consumer's memory. Intimacy is deep understanding with the brand and familiarity achieved through extensive brand knowledge, its history, memories of brand-related interactions and the use of brand nicknames or rituals. Intimacy can be promoted through sincere, informative advertising and public relations. The final dimension, brand-partner quality, reflects the consumer's overall assessment of the brand in its partnership role. "Research suggests that the ease in which a brand can be animated or humanized enhances partner quality judgments by facilitating the formation of performance-related inferences," (p132). This implies that due to their ability to humanize a brand, spokes-characters can have a large impact on brand-partner quality.

While all dimensions are interconnected, each dimension represents a different component of the consumer-brand relationship. Consumer scores will range from high to low on each factor based upon how the consumer views that aspect of the relationship (Fournier 1994). Scores will vary depending on the people involved in the relationship, the relationship's style and the relationship's maturity. Using these scores, marketers can determine how to best manage their marketing to address both the strengths and weaknesses of their brand relationships with consumers. To get the best results, marketers must analyze the BRQ construct in its entirety. The effectiveness of the construct will be compromised if only certain factors are considered.

Brands as Relationships Partners

Fournier (1998) also was one of the first to research a framework for understanding consumer-brand relationships, documenting that consumer-brand relationships closely mirror human interpersonal relationships. However, in the case of a brand "the brand has no objective existence at all: it is simply a collection of perceptions held in the mind of the consumer. The brand cannot act or think or feel except through the activities of the manager that administers it," (p345). Four core conditions qualify relationships as interpersonal. There must be a series of purposive, complex interactions between two partners: "For the brand to serve as a legitimate relationships partner, it must surpass the personification qualification and actually behave as an active contributing member in the dyad," (p 345). Spokes-characters can help this personification through their behavior and personality displayed in the brand's advertising. "Everyday execution of marketing plans and tactics can be construed as behaviors performed by the brand acting in its relationships role," (p345).

Consumer-Brand Relationships Typology

Fournier (1998) also established a typology through a method of in-depth interviews. This typology takes into account seven relationship categories: voluntary vs. imposed, positive vs. negative, intense vs. superficial (casual), enduring vs. short-term, public vs. private, formal (role or task oriented) vs. informal (personal) and symmetric vs. asymmetric. Using these category combinations, Fournier defines 15 different relationship types that consumers can

have with a brand. Combinations of these categories can create relationships varying from secret affairs, best friends and flings to committed partnerships (Fournier 1998). Through the use of spokes-characters and social media, marketers can influence several of these relationship categories. Social media relationships are by nature voluntary, public and can be symmetrical. Spokes-characters give brands a form through which brands can act, think or feel and allow brands to form real relationships with consumers. Through strategic marketing and management, marketers can determine which types of relationship categories will apply to their brand, thus deciding what type of relationships they wish to have with consumers.

The Evolution of Twitter as a Marketing Tool

Introduction to Twitter

Twitter, a microblogging site, has grown immensely since its launch in October 2006 (Twitter.com). According to Twitter, there are more than 200 million registered users generating 340 million tweets daily. When users create profiles, they select an avatar (profile picture) and write a short 160-character profile description. They then can send brief messages, called tweets, to the account's followers. Tweets are posts of no more than 140 characters about various topics, and can include photos and URLs. Twitter collects tweets from all the profiles a user follows, compiles the tweets and posts them to the user's Twitter feed. This allows users to quickly browse through lots of information they are interested in (Twitter.com).

Unlike Facebook, there are no company or brand pages. Companies create profiles just like all users, place their logo or spokes-character as the avatar and write about the company in the profile's bio section. On spokes-character profiles, marketers can choose to write the bio about the spokes-character as if it is a real entity or explain how a brand marketing team maintains the account. Companies may verify their profile with Twitter so users know the page represents the company or brand. A verified page has a blue checkmark to let users know it is genuine (Twitter.com). Rather than sidebar ads and pop-up ads, Twitter offers Promoted Tweets and Promoted Accounts. "Promoted Tweets are ordinary Tweets purchased by advertisers who want to reach a wider group of users or to spark engagement from their existing followers. Promoted Tweets are clearly labeled as Promoted when an advertiser is paying for their placement on Twitter. In every other respect, Promoted Tweets act just like regular Tweets and can be retweeted, replied to, favorited and more (Twitter.com)." Promoted Tweets show up in users' Twitter feeds intermixed among the other tweets. Marketers also have the choice to promote their company's profile with Promoted Accounts. These accounts show up in the "Who to Follow" section Twitter provides all users. Like Promoted Tweets, they are labeled as promoted but appear to be normal profiles. Twitter uses an algorithm to determine which users are most likely to be interested in the promoted account by targeting users more likely to consume the brand's product (Twitter.com).

Twitter.com also describes several key terms specific to Twitter. Mentions are when users mention other users in their tweets. Twitter users can do this by

preceding their account name with the @ symbol, for example "Happy birthday @jen_ireland." Hashtags marks (#'s) are also commonly used to distinguish tweets related to specific topics. Hashtags allow users to follow conversations centering on a particular topic, for example, "That last play was crazy! #SuperBowl." A third component of Twitter is retweets. When a user finds a tweet they wish to rebroadcast to their followers, they can retweet or copy the message. One way to retweet is to use the one-click option Twitter provides. The other retweet option begins the message with "RT," which stands for retweet, then addresses the original author followed by the original text. Users can choose to edit or add comments to the post or send it as it was originally written, for example, "I agree! RT '@jen_ireland I love rainy days.'"

Social Network User Typography

In 2007, Java divided Twitter users into three main categories: information sources, friends and information seekers. Information sources are users that are considered a hub of information with a large number of followers. They can tweet frequently or infrequently and be automated or human. Users in this category could be a newspaper such as the *Wall Street Journal* or a celebrity such as *Kim Kardashian.* The most common Twitter user falls into the friends category. There are many sub-categories such as family, co-worker or friends. Some users add people they don't personally know as friends on Twitter. The final category is the information seekers. This is a user who follows lots of people but rarely tweets. Information seekers use Twitter as an information source (Java 2007).

With marketers now using both Facebook and Twitter, research was done to see what drove consumers to one site over the other. While many consumers use both sites, they are utilized for very different reasons. Parr (2010) found Facebook users connect with friends to gain access to their information and keep up with their lives. Instead of sharing generic information, Facebook users most often post about personal matters, send birthday wishes to friends and comment on others' posted comments or photos (Parr 2010). On the other hand, Twitter users share more generalized comments and opinions about their surroundings and current events (Smith 2010). Instead of tailoring a message for a particular person, tweets are posted for mass interest and appeal. When interacting with a brand, Twitter users communicate with the brand itself but have little contact or feedback with the brand's other followers. It's to be assumed that Twitter followers are more interested in what the brand has to say than the opinions of the brand's other followers (Kwon 2011).

Brand Anthropomorphism on Twitter

Anthropomorphism is the psychological process of seeing human elements in nonhuman forms (Guthrie 1993). For marketing purposes, this is most important when it comes to brand image. Brand personalities are the subconscious feelings people have for a brand. They arise when people begin to anthropomorphize brands by attributing characteristics or emotions to brands (Aaker 1997).

Through social media, advertisers can encourage people's tendency to anthropomorphize products or brands. When people encounter a technology, such

as a website or spokes-character, that possesses human characteristics (language, turn taking, interactivity), they often respond in an equally human way (Moon 2000). In other words, on Twitter, if a spokes-character interacts with its followers by asking questions or responding to tweets, people will be more likely to respond and interact with the spokes-character in the same ways (Aggarwal 2007). Twitter allows brands to have a dialog with customers, display a sense of humor and come clean about their mistakes (Kwon 2011).

Retweeting Factors

To determine which message factors influenced people to spread information through retweeting, Suh, Hong, et al. (2010) examined both content features (URLs, hashtags and mentions) as well as contextual features of tweets (number of followers, number of profiles followed, age of the account, number of favorited tweets and number and frequency of tweets). A retweet was identified in two ways. The regular expression method is tweets that contained the same URLs and had the text markers: "RT", "retweeting", "retweet", "via", "thx" and "HT" (hat tip or heard through). These words allow the user to comment on and change the original tweet while still giving credit to the original sender. The second method was the feature retweet method, a Twitter feature that allows users to retweet another's message in its entirety to one's followers.

Among Suh and Hong's (2010) content features, they discovered URLs and hashtags were positively correlated with retweetability. URLs appeared in 21.1% of all tweets, yet 28.4% of retweets contained a URL. This shows that tweets with URLs

are more likely to be retweeted. When looking at hashtags, 10.1% of all tweets had at least one hashtag while 20.8% of retweets contained a hashtag. Suh and Hong concluded that tweets with hashtags were much more likely to be retweeted than tweets without hashtags or tweets with a URL. Among contextual features, the number of followers, number of profiles followed and age of the account affected retweeting. Twitter accounts activated less than one month ago or over ten months ago had much higher retweet rates than accounts active for two to nine months. This created a U-shaped curve. However, the number of past tweets did not seem to affect the potential of retweeting suggesting frequency of tweets does not affect retweeting.

Boyd, Golder and Lotan (2010) also did research as to why people retweeted and derived that a person's likeliness to retweet was heavily related to why they used Twitter. People using Twitter for daily chatter, original statements about themselves or non-newsworthy items are less likely to retweet information than those using Twitter to share information or engage in conversations. The researchers compiled a non-exhaustive list of the ten main reasons people retweet messages. They are: to spread tweets to new audiences, to entertain, to add new content to another's tweet, to make one's presence as a listener known, to publically agree, to validate other's thoughts, to show friendship or loyalty, to recognize less popular people, to gain followers or to save tweets for later access. Several of the most frequently retweeted messages were raising awareness for social or medical causes such as abortion, gun control or diseases.

To determine which retweeting model was correct, Macskassy and Michelson (2011) gathered 768,000 tweets from 30,000 users during one month and compared them with several popular retweeting models: general model, recent communication model, homophily model and on-topic model. The general model assumes that a user will randomly retweet any tweet but with a higher likelihood of one just seen as opposed to one seen longer ago. The recent communication model states a user may be more likely to retweet someone s/he has recently communicated with, either through a retweet or direct message. The on-topic model hypothesizes that a Twitter user is more likely to retweet messages relevant to the user's interests. The homophily model relates to the recipient's user profile. It states that a user is more likely to retweet another user if they have similar profiles or interests.

Macskassy and Michelson's (2011) findings showed the homophily model was by far the most likely model, as it explained 51.6% of retweets, followed by the recent communication model, the on-topic model and finally the general model. Macskassy and Michelson reported that a combination of three models explained over 70% of the user's retweets. This shows that users have many different reasons to retweet a message. When trying to understand why a particular information diffusion pattern appears, multiple models should be used.

Company/Brand Twitter Habits

Kwon and Sung (2011) content analyzed brands' tweets to discover how global brands used their Twitter profiles. For the initial research, 44 brands were analyzed. Of these, 70% mentioned their Twitter profile on their company's website.

Brand logos were used most frequently as avatars (86%). Product images were observed in only 6% of websites reviewed. Brand names were found in 68.8% of tweets, redirecting informational cues were in 65.9%, product-related cues were observed in 26.3%, while company-related cues were only found in 6.1%.

When researching brand anthropomorphism, Kwon and Sung (2011) followed 24 brands, including Coca-Cola, BlackBerry and Sprite, with the human representatives maintaining these accounts. Of these, two had images of celebrity endorsers, 14 provided marketer information such as their name, positions etc., and 15 showed the marketer's signature on the brand's tweets. Of the 2,200 tweets, 47.5% were original marketer-initiated messages, 37.5% were replies in which marketers responded to consumers and 15% were retweets from marketers disseminating information that did not originate with the brand. By using imperative verbs such as "follow the brand" and "sign up," marketers attempted to initiate relationships. Imperative verbs also were used to send consumers to other media such as corporate websites, social media sites and TV commercials. These findings also support previous research that Twitter is more useful in generating exposure and driving traffic to brand websites than selling products or services (Heaps 2009). Anthropomorphism was more prevalent in replies to consumers than in original tweets and retweets.

Message Categories

Java et al. analyzed 1,348,543 tweets from 76,177 users over a two-month period to establish the first Twitter tweet category system (2007). Tweeted

messages were placed into one of the following categories: daily chatter, conversations, sharing information and reporting news. Ambiguous tweets were placed in the unknown category. Daily chatter was the largest category. These are tweets about daily routine or what the user is currently doing. Conversations accounted for about one-eighth of all tweets. These included tweets with the "@" symbol followed by a username used to reply to others' comments or questions. The sharing information category was made up of tweets with a URL and made up 13%. Also, due to the small character limit (140), it was noted that many users used a URL shortening service like TinyURL. Reporting news tweets are similar to sharing information tweets except they did not include a URL. These are tweets from users reporting on the latest news or current events.

Pear Analytics (2009) content analyzed 2,000 tweets to revamp Java et al.'s (2007) categories. As a result, three new Tweet content categories were added. The six revised categories are: news, spam, self-promotion, pointless babble, conversational and pass-along value. News pertains to anything one might find on national news sources but not news forwarded by bloggers such as TechCrunch or Mashable. Spam includes tweets that are advertisements. Pear Analytics' spam example was "See how I got 3,000 followers in one day." Self-promotion tweets originate from companies or people endorsing their products or services. Pointless babble replaced the daily chatter category for tweets about a user's routine activities of little interest beyond the user's network of friends and followers. Conversational tweets are interactions back and forth between users. This also includes tweets that engage followers such as questions or surveys. Pear Analytics

also noted that if any tweet could fit into more than one category and started with "@" it was placed in the conversational category. Finally, pass-along value tweets were any tweets with "RT" in them.

In 2010, Dann looked at five previous Twitter message content structures: Java et al. (2007), Jansen et al. (2009), Pear Analytics (2009), Honeycutt and Herring (2009) and Naaman et al. (2010). By analyzing 2,841 tweets from Dann's own account over a span of two years, Dann consolidated the findings into the six broad categories and 26 subcategories detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Dann's Six Twitter Message Categories and 26 Subcategories

Conversational	Status	Pass along	News	Phatic	Spam
Query	Personal	Retweet	Headlines	Greeting	
Referral	Temporal	User generated content	Sport	Fourth wall	
Action	Location	Endorsement	Event	Broadcast	
Response	Mechanical		Weather	Unclassifiable	
	Physical				
	Work				
	Automated				
	Activity				

Conversational posts use the "@" symbol to indicate a directed message to another single user or user groups. This category can be broken down into four subcategories: query (direct question or referral to a poll), referral (URL directed to another user), action (descriptions of activities with other users) and response (tweets with "@" that do not meet other requirements). Status posts tell what the user is doing or thinking. Dann (2010) included eight status subcategories: personal

(personal opinions or emotions), temporal (content including specific dates and times), location (posts regarding travel and transport), mechanical (posts relating to technology), physical (physical or sensory experiences such as cold or tired), work (references to work or co-workers), automated (statuses updated by a third-party application) and activity (non-work, verb-based updates). Pass along includes tweets promoting another user via retweeting or endorsement. The three pass along subcategories are: retweet, user generated content (a URL linking to that person's blog or photo service) and endorsement (content containing a URL that fits in no other category). News tweets include coverage of mainstream media issues, social media news, live coverage and other news content using hashtags. The four subcategories are: headlines, sport, live event coverage (live discussion of an event through use of hashtags) and weather (tweets reporting temperature without accompanying commentary). Phatic tweets are of a broadcast nature. They are undirected opinions or statements and no response is expected. Phatic tweets may be a greeting (greetings to the broader community), fourth wall ("note to self" or "FYI" posts), broadcast (undirected statements sent to followers) and unclassifiable (tweets undecipherable due to error). Examples of phatic tweets are "Good morning Twitterverse," "Note to self, always make reservations" and "Merry Christmas everyone." The final category is spam. This includes junk traffic and automated posts deemed unwanted or unsolicited by the user (Dann, 2010).

Dann's (2010) category system is the first system that ensured all tweets qualify for only one category. The many subcategories removed room for doubt as to which category tweets fell under. It also leaves no room for a tweet to be

unknown, and leaves very few tweets "unclassifiable." This system should work for all Twitter profiles, including official company pages, brand pages and casual users.

Research Questions

Spokes-characters provide marketers an opportunity to create the perfect brand ambassador. From appearance, dialog and actions, marketers can tailor all aspects to fit perfectly with the brand. The addition of a spokes-character creates a visual hook resulting in high brand recognition and can allow brands to talk about taboo topics and transport consumers into a fantasy world (Callcott & Lee 1995; Baldwin 1982). When used on the Internet, people who interact with spokes-characters have more positive brand attitudes than those who do not. Over time, consumers can feel emotional connections towards spokes-characters and brands represented by spokes-characters (Liao 2011).

Fournier (1994) created the Brand Relationships Quality (BRQ) scale containing seven factors: personal commitment, love, passionate attachment, self-concept connection, nostalgic connection, intimacy and brand-partner quality. Fournier found that consumer-brand relationships closely mirror human interpersonal relationships, despite brands having no real existence. Brands exist only as the collection of perceptions held by the consumer. Fournier also defined 15 different relationship types that consumers can have with a brand ranging from secret affair, best friends and flings to committed partnerships. In order for a brand to participate as a legitimate relationship partner however, it needs to behave as a contributing member of the dyad. Due to the ability to humanize and personify a

24

brand, spokes-characters give brands a form through which the brand can develop and maintain consumer-brand relationships until the relationship develops into the type of relationship preferred by the brand's managers.

Twitter was founded with the objective of easy, simple information sharing across a large interpersonal network. Twitter allows users to quickly and easily find and share information with others. Twitter provides marketers with an interactive medium through which they can promote their company and brand. Twitter is used more for general comments and opinions that have mass appeal (Parr 2010). When consumers interact with brands on Twitter, they are more interested in interacting with the brand one-on-one as opposed to hearing and interacting with the comments of the brand's other followers (Kwon 2011). Twitter also allows more room for brand anthropomorphism. Brands can interact with followers by answering their questions, asking them questions, apologizing for mistakes and displaying a sense of humor.

Through managed consumer interactions between spokes-characters and highly involved consumers, marketers have the potential to greatly improve the quality of the brand-consumer relationship. Spokes-characters are controllable, often likable and develop relationships between brands and consumers as if the spokes-character/consumer were experiencing genuine human interaction. The research questions detailed below do not address the quality of the interactions produced via Twitter, satisfaction with Twitter interactions, nor do they directly address the specific details of tweeted content. Rather, the research questions examine manifest tweeted content to determine if variability is observed between

the types of material tweeted by characters, as well as they frequency with which

spokes-characters foster interaction. After establishing systematic differences, if

any, theory-driven research will be required to investigate the content of tweets to

determine which factors noted by Fournier (1994; 1998) brand managers may be

attempting to influence.

RQ1: What types of content are tweeted by brand spokes-characters to members of the spokes-character's Twitter network?

RQ2: How often do spokes-characters tweet?

RQ3: When are spokes-characters most likely to tweet?

> RQ3.1: On which days of the week do spokes-characters tweet most often?
> RQ3.2: At what time of day are spokes-characters most likely to tweet?
> RQ3.3: Is there a pattern throughout the year of seasons or months with
>   higher Twitter usage from spokes-characters?

RQ4: Are human spokes-characters more frequent tweeters than animated spokes-characters?

RQ5: Do spokes-characters of similar product categories tweet differently from spokes-characters of other product categories?

Having reviewed relevant literature on the development of Twitter as a

marketing tool, preliminary research on the types of content likely to be tweeted,

the strategic and tactical value of spokes-characters and research on the emotional

interaction between brands and the brand's users, the next section of this research

describes the method used to assess how brand managers use a spokes-character's

Twitter feed.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of tweets from the 20 spokes-characters listed in Table 1. These profiles are either the brand's main page using the spokes-character as the avatar or a separate profile created just for the spokes-character. Eleven of the spokes-characters were chosen based upon their appearance on several lists: *16 Most Annoying Mascots on TV Today* (US Data Corporation, 2011), *America's 12 Most Loved Spokes-characters* (Forbes.com, 2011), *Top 10 Icons of the Century* (Adage.com, 1999) and *19 Greatest Mascots in History* (Rogers, 2011). Three additional spokes-characters were included due to the character's large number of Twitter followers and the character's active social media presence. The remaining six spokes-characters were selected largely because of Twitter availability. (Many commonly recognized spokes-characters (Tony the Tiger (Kellogg's Frosted Flakes), Mr. Peanut (Planter's), Betty Crocker), do not have a presence on the Twitter micro-blogging network.) The 20 spokes-characters examined here tweet often, actively engage with consumers through multiple media and also represent a variety of product types.

The unit of analysis is the tweeted message. For this research, a spokes-character tweet is defined as a message sent by the spokes-character to the character's Twitter feed followers. A character may produce several tweets in a single day or no tweets at all. The 20 spokes-characters examined here produced 13,455 tweets for the two-year period ending March 3, 2013. A sampling strategy was established to randomly select tweets to be coded. Once the total number of

tweets was known, each tweet was assigned a unique number ranging from 1 –

13,455 and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Next, the Excel software program

randomly selected 20 percent of the tweets for coding. This simple random

sampling technique yielded 2,691 tweets (20 percent of the total). Of the remaining

tweets, the same simple random sampling procedure produced an additional 500

tweets to be used for coder training. The training tweets were not included in the

final sample used to compile research results.

Table 1: Selected Spokes-Characters

Company	Spokes-Character Description
Pillsbury Doughboy *Pillsbury Refrigerated Dough*	The Pillsbury Doughboy was created for TV in 1965 as a non-human animated character. He's always featured with his iconic neckerchief and chef's hat and acts as a friend and instructor to family cooks in TV ads. Throughout the years, he has taken on multiple occupations (ballet dancer, skydiver) and had many accessories (skateboard, violin) and is in all aspects of Pillsbury's branding and advertising (GeneralMills.com, 2013).
Chick-fil-A Cows *Chick-fil-A*	Debuted in 1995, they are non-animated cows that are used in TV, radio, internet and promotional materials. They encourage consumers to eat Chick-fil-A chicken through homemade signs and painted billboards, however, never speak (Chick-fil-A.com, 2013).
Mr. Clean *Mr. Clean bathroom cleaning products*	Mr. Clean was created in 1957 for Proctor and Gamble's Mr. Clean bathroom cleaning products. He is prevalent in TV and print ads as well as all product packaging. In the late '90s, Mr. Clean began to more actively interact with consumers to change men's role in the home. Today, he remains an animated human in ads with a non-animated human version who makes event appearances (MrClean.com, 2013).
Flo *Progressive Insurance*	Introduced in 2008, Flo was an instant social media hit. Flo is a human non-celebrity whose quirky wit has created very polar opinions. She is used in TV, radio and print to explain Progressive's discounts and is extremely engaging on the internet and social media (Progressive.com, 2013).
Snuggle Bear *Snuggle fabric softener*	Snuggle, a Unilever company, created an animated talking teddy bear named Snuggle Bear in 1983. The traditionally sweet bear was given a makeover in 2003 to become more hip, smooth and smart. Today he promotes Snuggle to consumers in TV and radio and is displayed on all packaging (Elliot, 2003).
Buzz Bee *Honey Nut Cheerios*	Buzz Bee was introduced on Honey Nut Cheerios packaging in 1979. However, he did not engage the consumer and wasn't given a name until 2000. His goal is to tell everyone about Cheerios' good

	taste through radio, TV, print and internet (Cheerios.com, 2013).
Charmin Bears *Charmin toilet paper*	The original Charmin Bear was introduced in 2000 as an animated bear. Today the animated campaign consists of Molly the mom, Leonard the dad, Bill the oldest son, Amy the middle child and Dylan the youngest. Charmin's campaign depicts their lives and their different needs for all Charmin products (Charmin.com, 2013).
Chuck E. Cheese *Chuck E. Cheese Pizza Time Theater*	Chuck E. Cheese Pizza Time Theater opened in 1977 with an animated rat named Chuck E. Cheese as its mascot. He has been through several makeovers with his most recent in 2012 to become a cool guitar playing rock star (Choi, 2012).
Scrubbing Bubbles *Scrubbing Bubbles bathroom cleaner*	The scrubbing bubbles are a friendly group of animated bubbles (Scrubby, Poppy, Sudsy, Mindy) that work together to clean people's bathroom (ScrubbingBubbles.com, 2013).
Charlie the Tuna *Starkist*	Created in 1961, Charlie the Tuna has been utilized in all forms of advertising for more than 50 years. Throughout the years, he has alternated between active and passive voice to prevent burn out (StarKist.com, 2013).
Nesquik Bunny *Nestle*	In 1973, Nestle introduced an animated rabbit called the Nestle Quik Bunny to promote their powdered chocolate milk. When the product changed names, he was renamed the Nesquik Bunny. He is prevalent in their print and TV ads as well as promotional materials (Retroplanet.com, 2013).
Jack Box *Jack in the Box restaurants*	Jack Box is a fictional human spokes-character with a human body but a cartoon clown head. He was transitioned from passive to active engagement in a 1980 TV ad. Since then, consumers have been introduced to his life, family and past through various media types (JackIntheBox.com, 2013).
Jolly Green Giant *Green Giant frozen vegetables*	Created in 1925 for the Minnesota Canning Company, the Jolly Green Giant is a green animated human named after a type of large peas. He first appeared in ads in 1928 and ever since has been presiding over his garden with his iconic "Ho Ho Ho." He became so popular the company renamed itself after him and a placed a 55-foot statue of him is in his birthplace of Blue Earth, Minnesota (GreenGiant.com, 2013).
Cap'n Crunch *Cap'n Crunch cereal*	The Cap'n is an animated pirate that is the spokes-character and mascot of Cap'n Crunch cereal. Since his debut in 1963, the Cap'n has introduced five new cereals and traveled the seas with his friends. Consumers are updated on his life through ads in multiple media types and the internet (CapnCrunch.com, 2013).
E*TRADE baby *E*TRADE*	In 2008, E*TRADE released a Super Bowl ad of a non-animated baby talking about managing his stocks with E*TRADE. The next day, E*TRADE registered more users in one day than ever before. Since then, several more babies have been added to the TV campaign (FastCompany.com, 2013).
Energizer Bunny *Energizer Batteries*	This Ray-Ban wearing, pink, stuffed-animal bunny has been beating his drum since his introduction in 1989. While he does not speak, he still appears in TV and print ads with the slogan "it keeps going and going" (TheHistoryChannel.com, 2013).

| Travelocity Gnome

Travelocity	The Travelocity Gnome is a non-animated garden gnome that was snatched from his garden and now travels the world advertising Travelocity's cheap rates. His adventures have been documented in multiple media types and he is heavily interactive with consumers on digital media (Sun, 2011).
GEICO Gecko

GEICO Insurance | In 1999, an animated green gecko with a British accent pled with America to stop calling him, instead of GEICO, for insurance claims (GEICO). He quickly became loved. Today, the Gecko is featured in all media types and has made multiple most loved spokes-characters lists (Forbes.com, 2013). |
| Aflac duck

Aflac Insurance | The Aflac duck is a real white duck that is computer manipulated into many situations. Introduced in 2000, he only says the word "Aflac" but has lots of personality demonstrated in TV, radio and print advertisements (Aflac.com, 2013). |
| Ms. Green M&M

M&Ms | M&Ms has long created campaigns off the personalities of the animated Red and Yellow M&Ms. Now Green, Blue, Orange and Brown are given their own personalities through TV, print and radio ads. Ms. Green has a sexy sassy personality and is currently the official spokes-character on social media (Elliot, 2012). |

Each spokes-character's tweet count can be reviewed in Table 2. A large range of Twitter activity can be observed among these characters. The spokes-character with the largest number of tweets is Chuck E. Cheese. This character accounts for 1,828 tweets (13.5%) of the total 13,455 tweets. The E*Trade Baby and the Chick-fil-A cows account for 280 and 281 tweets, respectively (2%), making these characters the most infrequent tweets observed in this research.

Table 2: Selected Spokes-Characters' Tweet Count

Spokes-character Name	Twitter Handle	Tweets Generated
Flo	ItsFlo	792
Chuck E Cheese	chuckecheese	1,828
Scrubbing Bubbles	ScrubbingBubble	764
Charlie the Tuna	StarKistCharlie	519
Pillsbury Doughboy	Pillsbury	670
Charmin Bears	Charmin	318
Nesquik Bunny	NestleNesquik	1,619
Snuggle Bear	Snuggle_Bear	640
Chick-fil-A Cows	EatMorChikin	281
Mr. Clean	RealMrClean	370
Cap'n Crunch	RealCapnCrunch	724

Jack Box	JackBox	696
Green Giant	GreenGiant	777
E*TRADE Baby	Etradebaby	280
Energizer Bunny	EnergizerBunny	374
Buzz Bee	Buzzthebee	420
Travelocity Gnome	RoamingGnome	800
Geico Gecko	TheGEICOGecko	375
Aflac Duck	Aflacduck	741
Ms. Green M&M	Mmsgreen	439
Grand Total		**13,455**

Coding Sheet

The first section of the coding sheet required coders to assess variables about the spokes-character, including the character's name, categorizing the spokes-character as animated or non-animated human and non-human male or female. The product category of the brand represented by the spokes-characters was coded as one of the following: restaurant (where people pay to eat meals, fast-food or sit-down), service (company with an intangible product, such as insurance), pre-packaged food product (boxed cereal, for example) and other.

The next items coded were various aspects of the tweets, including the date, time and day of the week the tweet was posted. Tweets were coded as one of three types: original post, retweet (RT) or reply (@). Only tweets originating from the character were coded. For example, if someone tweets Flo (Progressive Insurance) asking how she is doing, the tweet was not coded. However, Flo's response to the tweet would be coded. Next, coders checked for the presence of a URL, photo or hashtag.

The final coding categories determined content of the tweeted message.

Coders determined what voice the tweet was written in. Character voice is indicated

by personal pronouns such as "I." In the case of group characters, the use of the

pronoun "we" might be observed. These tweets embody the personality of the

spokes-character. Corporate voice tweets include words such as "we," "us," and

"they." Corporate tweets also include the name of the marketer sending the tweet.

Tweets were be marked as unknown if the voice was not apparent. The final

question coded content related to Dann's (2010) message content categorical

system. Each tweet was categorized into one content category and subcategory

associated with the main content. Table 3 details the content categories.

Table 3: Coded Tweet Content Categories

Category	Definition	Example
1. Conversational	Uses "@" symbol to direct message to another user	
Query	Any tweet with both an "@" symbol and a "?"	@user what did you think about that movie last night?
Referral	Any URL directed to another user	Haha! @user this reminds me of you www.url.com !
Action	Descriptions of activities involving other users	Dancing at the Beyonce concert with @user
Response	Tweets that engage other users but do not meet other requirements of containing action, question or referral	Love the book @user loaned me
2. Status	Messages that answer the question "what are you doing now"	
Personal	Any tweet using personal pronouns, statements of opinions or emotions	I think college football is the most exciting sport
Temporal	All content referencing specific dates, time, activity or inactivity with emphasis on the time of the event	Bored waiting in the doctor's office for my 3pm appointment
Location	Comments regarding travel, and location. Includes Foursquare check-ins[1]	Stuck in the library during the tornado warning

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[1] Foursquare is a phone app that registers a user's geographic location.

Mechanical	Any tweet relating to technology such as cars, computers, phones, data and the related technical issues of these devices	Looks like I broke another iPhone
Physical	Physical or sensory experiences such as heat, hunger, tiredness, cold, etc.	Freezing walking to class this morning
Work	Any reference to work related activities such as getting things done, jobs, bosses, co-workers, etc.	After just 1 hour at work I've checked 3 things off my to-do list
Automated	Tweets triggered automatically by a 3rd party application such as Foursquare mayorship	_____
Activity	Non-work activities, includes any verb-based update describing an activity in progress, excludes actions captured in other categories	Cooking a delicious Mexican dinner
3. Pass along	Tweets that provide content	
Retweet	Any tweet including "RT" "via @" "thx" or other retweet acknowledgement to the original source	So cute! RT @user look at this picture of my puppy! www.pic.com
User Generated Content	Any URL which can be identified as the user's blog or photo link	Check out my new purse www.pic.com
Endorsement	Any other content with a URL that is self-promoting	Check out my Klout score on www.klout.com!
4. News	Tweets about mainstream issues	
Headlines	Tweets that resemble mainstream media news coverage of breaking events	Obama wins second term. www.url.com
Sport	Tweets with identifiable results of sporting events, including live scores or announcements of event outcomes	Alabama crushes Notre Dame 42-14 for BCS title
Live event coverage	Tweets that represent a live discussion of an identified event through hashtags	That ending was so sad! #DowntonAbbey
Weather	Any tweet reporting temperature without any accompanying commentary.	_____
5. Phatic	Tweets of a third person nature	
Greetings	Generic statements of time, place and greeting to followers by addressing them indirectly	Good morning Twitterverse
Fourth wall	Information for self category. "Note to self," "FYI," "Just for the record" or "thought bubble" style comments.	Note to self: always check the weather before leaving the house
Broadcast	Undirected statements which allow for opinion, statements and random thoughts to be sent to the author's followers	"Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people."-Eleanor Roosevelt
Unclassifiable	Undecipherable tweets due to error	_____
6. Spam	Junk traffic, unsolicited automated posts	

Procedure

Two graduate students were trained to code tweets for this research. A training pool of 500 tweets was randomly selected for coder training. These tweets were not included in the final sample. During the training period, the two coders worked alone to familiarize themselves with the coding scheme and the coding sheet. Inter-coder reliability was checked at the end of the 500-tweet training period. Reliability was assessed with Cohen's Kappa, where Pr(a) is the observed percentage of agreement and Pr(e) is the expected percentage of agreement The randomly selected analyzed sample contained 2,691 tweets. Both coders examined the same 500 tweets and inter-coder reliability was calculated. The remaining 2,191 tweets were split between the two coders. For this analysis of largely manifest content, inter-coder reliabilities for each variable exceeded 90 percent reliability.

Table 4: Inter-coder Reliabilities, by Variable

Variable Name	Cronbach Alpha
Appearance	1.00
Gender	1.00
Product Type	1.00
Tweet Type	.95
URL Included	1.00
Photo Link Included	1.00
Hashtag	1.00
Video Link Included	1.00
Link to Website	1.00
Tweet Reference Brand	.93
Conversational	.92
Status	.90
Pass-along	.91
News	1.00
Phatic	.91
Spam	1.00
Voice	.88

What Kind Conversational	.93
What Kind Status	.90
What Kind Pass-along	.92
What Kind News	1.00
What Kind Phatic	.90

RESULTS

Over the course of this study, 2,691 tweets from 20 brand spokes-characters over two years were content analyzed. The data were entered into SPSS and appropriate statistical tests were conducted to establish significant differences. A pre-determined alpha probability of $\leq .05$ was selected as the minimum probability for identifying significant differences.

Table 5: Content Analysis Frequencies

Table 5.1: Spokes-characters

Spokes-character	n	%
Flo	188	7
Chuck E. Cheese	429	15.9
Scrubbing Bubbles	104	3.9
Charlie the Tuna	149	5.5
Pillsbury Doughboy	52	1.9
Charmin Bears	135	5
Nesquik Bunny	249	9.3
Snuggle Bear	106	3.9
Chick-fil-A Cows	65	2.4
Mr. Clean	67	2.5
Cap'n Crunch	179	6.7
Jack Box	112	4.2
Green Giant	124	4.6
E*TRADE baby	44	1.6
Energizer Bunny	117	4.3
Buzz Bee	116	4.3
Travelocity Gnome	128	4.8
Geico Gecko	48	1.8
Aflac Duck	202	7.5
Ms. Green M&M	77	2.9
Total	2691	100

Table 5.2: Appearance

	Animated	Non-animated	Total
n	2029	662	2691
%	75.4	24.6	100

Table 5.3: Gender

	Male	Female	Can't be Certain	Group M/F	Total
n	1848	335	293	215	2691
%	68.7	12.4	10.9	8	100

Table 5.4: Product Type

	Restaurant	Service	Pre-packaged Food	Other	Total
n	607	611	989	484	2691
%	22.6	22.7	36.8	18	100

Table 5.5: Day of the Week

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
n	411	439	480	543	450	194	174	2691
%	15.3	16.3	17.8	20.2	16.7	7.2	6.5	100

Table 5.6: Time of day

	Early morning (12a-5a)	Morning (5:01a-11a)	Afternoon (11:01a-2p)	Late afternoon (2:01p-6p)	Night (6:01p-9p)	Late night (9p-11:59p)	Total
n	25	1131	749	620	126	40	2691
%	.9	42	27.8	23	4.7	1.5	100

Table 5.7: Tweets per Month

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
n	231	266	142	124	122	129	312	280	258	293	304	230	2691
%	8.6	9.9	5.3	4.6	4.5	4.8	11.6	10.4	9.6	10.9	11.3	8.5	100

Table 5.8: Tweet Type

	Original	Retweet	Retweet with comment	Reply	Total
n	1717	296	241	437	2691
%	63.8	11	9	16.2	100

Table 5.9: URL

	Yes	No	Total
n	972	1719	2691
%	36.1	63.9	100

Table 5.10: Photo link

	Product or building	Spokes-character or friend	Spokes-character and consumers	Consumer using product	Other	Broken	Total
n	45	119	19	16	69	15	283
Valid %	15.9	42	6.7	5.7	24.4	5.3	100
%	1.7	4.4	.7	.6	2.6	.6	10.5

Table 5.11: Hashtag

	Yes	No	Total
n	1117	1574	2691
%	41.5	58.5	100

Table 5.12: Video link

	Consumers	Ad just on Twitter	Ad shown on TV	Product	Spokes-character	Other	Broken	Total
n	2	4	19	2	7	41	10	283
Valid %	2.4	4.7	22.4	2.4	8.2	48.2	11.8	100
%	.1	.1	.7	.1	.3	1.5	.4	3.2

Table 5.13: Website link

	Company blog or website	News article	Blog or website not company owned	Other	Broken	Total
n	345	21	186	8	64	624
Valid %	55.3	3.4	29.8	1.3	10.3	100
%	12.8	.8	6.9	.3	2.4	23.4

Table 5.14: Brand Reference

	Yes	No	Total
n	678	2013	2691
%	25.2	74.8	100

Table 5.15: Conversational Tweets

	Query	Referral	Action	Response	Total
n	29	92	24	524	669
Valid %	4.3	13.8	3.6	78.3	100
%	1.1	3.4	.9	19.5	24.9

Table 5.16: Status Tweets

	Personal	Temporal	Location	Mechanical	Physical	Work	Auto	Activity	Total
n	164	54	31	0	4	0	2	89	344
Valid%	47.7	15.7	9	0	1.2	0	.6	25.9	100
%	6.1	2	1.2	0	.1	0	.1	3.3	12.8

Table 5.17: Pass-along Tweets

	Retweet	User Generated Content	Endorsement	Total
n	561	406	120	1087
Valid %	51.6	37.4	11	100
%	20.8	15.1	4.5	40.4

Table 5.18: News Tweets

	Headlines	Sport	Live event	Weather	Total
n	4	0	3	1	8
Valid %	50	0	37.5	12.5	100
%	.1	0	.1	.1	.3

Table 5.19: Phatic Tweets

	Greetings	Fourth wall	Broadcast	Total
n	90	15	478	583
Valid %	15.4	2.6	82	100
%	3.3	.6	17.8	21.7

Table 5.20: Tweet Voice

	Character	Corporation	Unknown	Retweet	Total
n	829	337	1089	436	2691
%	30.8	12.5	40.5	16.2	100

Research Question 1

The first research question asked what type of content is tweeted by brand spokes-characters to members of their Twitter network. The frequencies in Tables 4.14 - 4.19 show the type of content tweeted from highest (pass along) to lowest (news). As an example, the following pass along tweet was posted by Buzz the Bee: "Are you busy as a bee --- like me? You deserve a little break! Buzzb.ee/OUy5cZ# BestVideoGameEver." A news event tweet originated with E*Trades' spokes-character, the E*Trade Baby. The character referred to a sports event: "What would happen if all of the confetti and balloons fell early? #michigan #louisville." Jack Box (Jack in the Box) used a conversational response for a follower's query this way: "Funny you should say that @rainnwilson – Bane did actually apply to work at our

store but we have a strict no villain policy." A sample of the phatic post category was

observed in posting from Ms. Green M&M (M&M's): "Good Morning Beautiful

People! Hope you all have FABULOUS Friday! XOXO, Ms. Green." No spam tweets

were among the tweets investigated here.

When looking only at pass-along tweets, just over half were retweets. The

other pass-along tweets included user-generated content and endorsement. When

looking just at conversational tweets, 78.3 percent were responses with 13.8

percent referrals and very few queries or calls to action. Table 4.8 shows the

frequencies for tweet type. The most frequently observed tweet category was

original message (63.8 percent) with retweet, retweet with comment and reply

comprising the remaining 36.2 percent. The URL most frequently tweeted was a

website link (23.3 percent) followed by photos (10.5%) and videos (3.3%). A little

more than one third of all tweets contained at least one URL.

Table 6: Impact of Spokes-Character Demographics on Tweet Type

	Original		Retweet		Retweet with comment		Reply		Total
Type	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Male	1055	57.1	240	13	184	10	369	20	1848
Female	300	89.6	9	2.7	22	6.6	4	1.2	335
Can't be certain	193	65.9	16	5.5	21	7.2	63	21.5	293
Group M/F	169	78.6	31	14.4	14	6.5	1	.5	215
Animated	1177	58	249	12.3	194	9.6	409	20.2	2029
Non-animated	540	81.6	47	7.1	47	7.1	28	4.2	662
Restaurant	267	44	70	11.5	37	6.1	233	38.4	607
Service	526	86.1	23	3.8	56	9.2	6	1	611
Pre-packaged	533	53.9	160	16.2	134	13.5	162	16.4	989

food
Other   391   80.8   43   8.9   14   2.9   36   7.4   484

Three chi-square analyses were run for tweet types comparing them with gender, appearance and product category. The first test showed a significant difference in tweet type based upon the character's gender (x^2 = 200.72, df = 9, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691). Female spokes-characters tweeted 89.6 percent original tweets and 1.2 percent replies, while males tweeted 57.1 percent original tweets and 20 percent replies. In other words, female spokes-characters were more likely to initiate interactions with users, while males were more likely to respond to interactions generated by users. A second test also showed significant differences in tweet type based on the spokes-character's appearance (x^2 = 136.92, df = 3, p$\leq$ .000, n = 437). Animated spokes-characters tweeted 58 percent original posts and 20.2 percent replies, while non-animated spokes-characters tweeted 81.6 percent original content and 4.2 percent replies. The results of this analysis indicate that human spokes-characters are more likely to tweet original content as compared to animated characters. The third test also revealed a significant relationship between tweet type and product category (x^2 = 520.07, df = 9, p $\leq$ .000, n = 2691). Restaurant and pre-packaged food products tweeted 16.4 percent and 38.4 percent replies respectively, while services and other product categories tweeted 1 percent and 7.4 percent replies, respectively. Food product spokes-characters were significantly more likely to reply to consumer inquiries than spokes-characters representing other product categories. These data demonstrate that a spokes-

character's tweeted content differed based upon the spokes-character's gender, physical appearance and product category characteristics.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked how often spokes-characters tweet. The spokes-characters sampled in this research tweeted 2,691 times. This produces a mean of 136 tweets per character during the two-year period analyzed. Within the randomly selected data set, the spoke-character with the fewest tweets was the GEICO Gecko (48). The character with the most tweets was Chuck E. Cheese (429). The mean number of tweets for male spokes-characters was 143. Female spokes-characters tweeted a mean of 132 messages, while can't be certain tweeted 117 times and mixed male/female groups tweeted 120 messages. Table 4.1 details each character's tweet frequency.

An independent means t-test was calculated to see if there is a significant difference between the mean tweets generated by female spokes-characters as compared to male spokes-characters. Tweets for spokes-characters appearing in groups were excluded from this analysis (Scrubbing Bubbles, Charmin Bears and Chick-fil-A Cows). There is a wide disparity noted between female and male spokes-characters. Only two spokes-characters were identified as female, Flo (Progressive Insurance) and Ms. Green M&Ms. The females combined for 265 tweets (mean = 132.) In contrast, the 15 male spokes-characters produced 2122 tweets (mean = 141). Despite having many more male characters than females, no significant difference is observed between the means for male and female spokes-characters at the pre-determined minimum probability level off $p \geq .05$.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked when spokes-characters are most likely to tweet examined by three variables: month of the year, time of day and day of the week. The three coded time variables were then compared with spokes-characters of different gender and product categories.

The first analysis examined tweeting patterns throughout the year among all spokes-characters. As seen in Figure 2, the heaviest tweeting months are July through November, with July accounting for the largest percentage of tweets, 11.6 percent. The fewest tweets were observed in May with 4.5 percent.

Figure 2: Monthly Tweet Frequencies for all Spokes-Characters
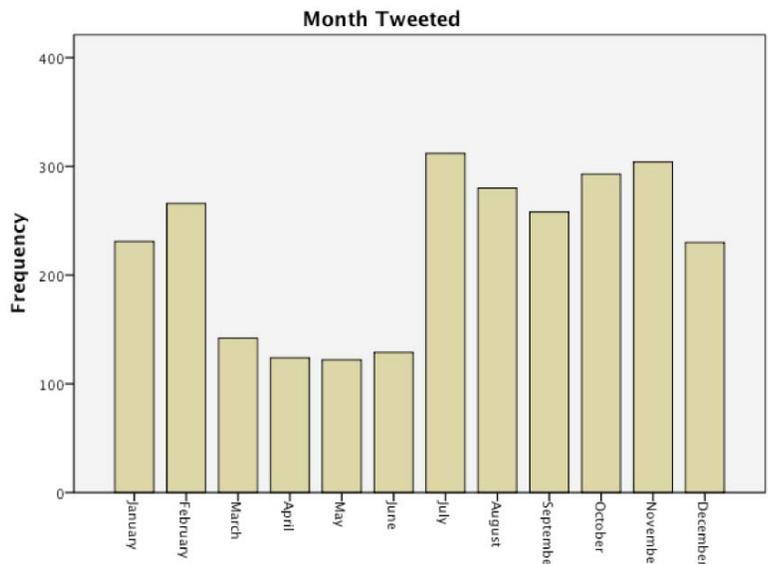
When month and gender are considered together, males most frequently tweeted in July (13.1%) and least in May (3.6%). Females tweeted most frequently

in January (14.3%) and least in August (3.9%). Characters of unknown gender

tweeted most in November (12.3%) and least in January (3.8%), and mixed group

spokes-characters tweeted most frequently in August (18.1%) and least in April

(1.9%). A chi-square analysis showed a statistical significance in the relationship

between months, gender and tweeting frequency (x^2 = 156.91, df = 33, p $\leq$ .000 and

n=2691). Table 7 contains the monthly tweets for each character gender.

Table 7: Month Frequencies with Gender

Male	n	%	Female	n	%
Jan	155	8.4	Jan	48	14.3
Feb	182	9.8	Feb	43	9.8
March	91	4.9	March	22	6.6
April	70	3.8	April	16	4.8
May	66	3.6	May	21	6.3
June	86	4.7	June	14	4.2
July	245	13.1	July	24	7.2
August	197	10.7	August	13	3.9
Sept	179	9.7	Sept	32	9.6
Oct	207	11.2	Oct	42	12.5
Nov	212	11.5	Nov	30	9
Dec	158	8.5	Dec	30	9
Total	1848		Total	335	

Unknown	n	%	Group	n	%
Jan	11	3.8	Jan	17	7.9
Feb	12	4.1	Feb	29	13.5
March	91	7.8	March	6	2.8
April	70	11.6	April	4	1.9
May	66	7.2	May	14	6.5
June	86	7.8	June	6	2.8
July	245	10.9	July	11	5.1
August	197	10.6	August	39	18.1
Sept	179	10.2	Sept	17	7.9
Oct	18	6.1	Oct	26	12.1
Nov	36	12.3	Nov	26	12.1
Dec	22	7.5	Dec	20	9.3
Total	293		Total	215	

Monthly tweets were also compared by product type as shown in Table 8. Restaurants tweeted most frequently in July (22.2%) and least in June and January (5.1%). Services concentrated their tweets towards the end of the year with the highest month being October (15.2%) and lowest months being April and May (2.3%). Pre-packaged food characters tweeted most often in July (12.1%) and least often in April (4.1%). Spokes-characters that fell into the other category tweeted most in August (13.4%) and least in March (3.5%). Chi-square analysis showed statistical significance between month, the frequency of tweets and product type (x^2 = 262.10, df = 33, p $\leq$ .000 and n=2691).

Table 8: Monthly Frequencies by Product Category

Restaurant	n	%	Service	n	%
Jan	31	5.1	Jan	76	12.4
Feb	43	7.1	Feb	57	9.3
March	36	5.9	March	36	5.9
April	45	7.4	April	14	2.3
May	40	6.6	May	14	2.3
June	31	5.1	June	8	2.7
July	135	22.2	July	27	4.4
August	75	12.4	August	46	7.5
Sept	46	7.6	Sept	92	15.1
Oct	41	6.8	Oct	93	15.2
Nov	47	7.7	Nov	84	13.7
Dec	37	6.1	Dec	64	10.5
Total	607		Total	335	

Pre-packaged food	n	%	Other	n	%
Jan	82	8.3	Jan	42	8.7
Feb	112	11.3	Feb	54	11.2
March	53	5.4	March	17	3.5
April	41	4.1	April	24	5
May	43	4.3	May	25	5.2
June	65	6.6	June	25	5.2
July	120	12.1	July	30	6.2

August	94	9.5	August	65	13.4
Sept	83	8.4	Sept	37	7.6
Oct	108	10.9	Oct	51	10.5
Nov	112	11.3	Nov	61	12.6
Dec	76	7.7	Dec	53	11
Total	989		Total	484	

Next, time of day was analyzed. Figure 3 shows the pattern when looking at all tweets. Tweets were most often sent in the morning time period (42 percent). The fewest tweets were observed in the early morning, accounting for less than one percent of all tweets observed.

Figure 3: Time of Day Frequencies with all Spokes-Characters
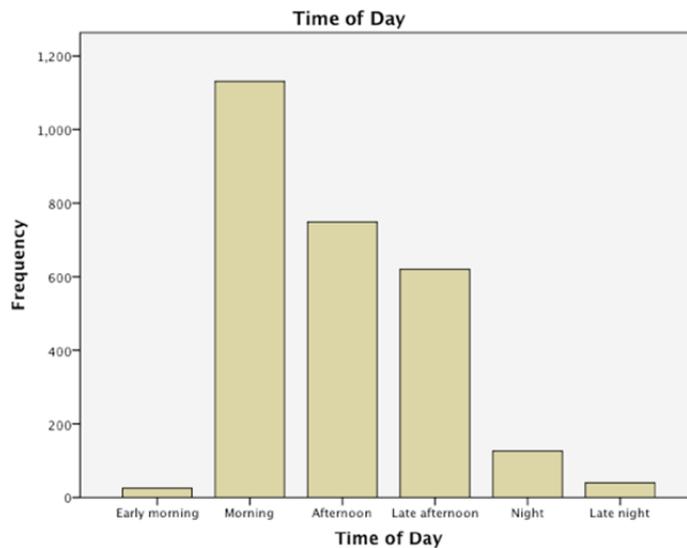
When looking at gender and time of day in Table 9, males were the only spokes-characters tweeting in the early morning and late night slots. Females were observed tweeting more than over half of their messages in the morning and

afternoon. Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between spokes-character gender and time of day for tweeting (x^2 = 311.21, df = 15, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691).

Table 9: Time of Day Frequencies with Gender

	Early Morning		Morning		Afternoon		Late Afternoon		Night		Late Night		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	Total
Female	0	0	148	44.2	67	20	120	35.8	0	0	0	0	335
Male	25	1.4	694	2.2	535	29	470	25.4	84	4.5	40	2.2	1848
Unsure	0	0	185	63.1	78	26.6	30	10.2	0	0	0	0	293
Group	0	0	104	48.4	69	32.1	0	0	42	19.5	0	0	215

Comparing different product types in Table 10, only Service and Pre-packaged Food spokes-characters tweeted in the early morning and only Service spokes-characters tweeted late at night. All tweets were heavily concentrated at morning and afternoon times. Product category and time of day were also shown to have statistically significant differences (x^2 = 576.96, df = 15, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691).

Table 10: Time of Day Frequencies with Different Product Types

	Early Morning		Morning		Afternoon		Late Afternoon		Night		Late Night		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	Total
Restaurant	0	0	257	42.3	143	23.6	206	33.9	1	.2	0	0	607
Service	19	3.1	243	39.8	170	27.8	118	19.3	21	3.4	40	6.5	611
Pre-packaged food	6	.6	389	39.3	344	34.8	241	24.4	9	.9	0	0	989
Other	0	0	242	50	92	19	55	11.4	95	19.6	0	0	484

Tweets are reported by days of the week in Figure 4. Thursdays had the highest concentration of tweets with a drastic decline on weekends.

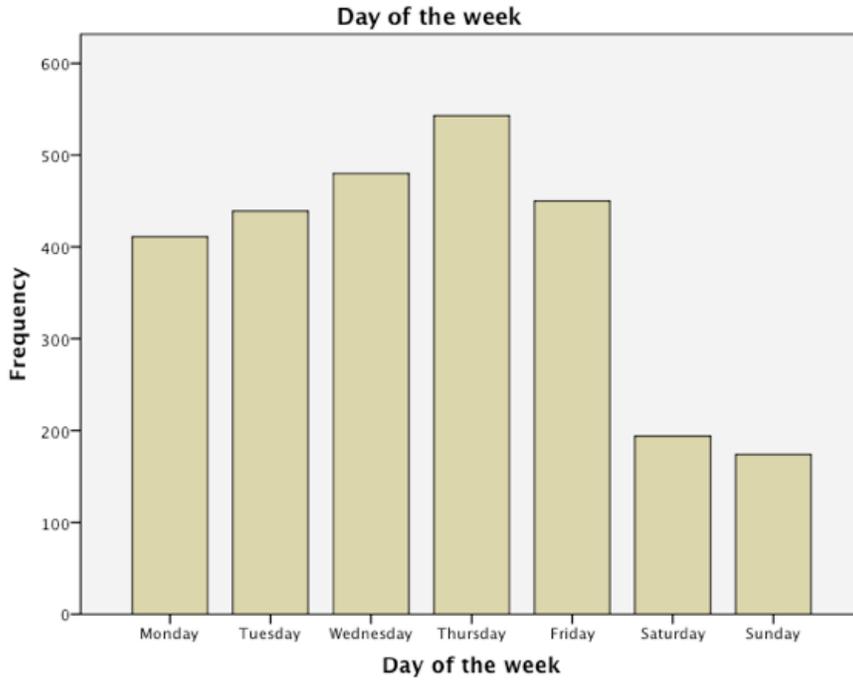*Figure 4: Day of the Week Frequencies of all Spokes-Characters*

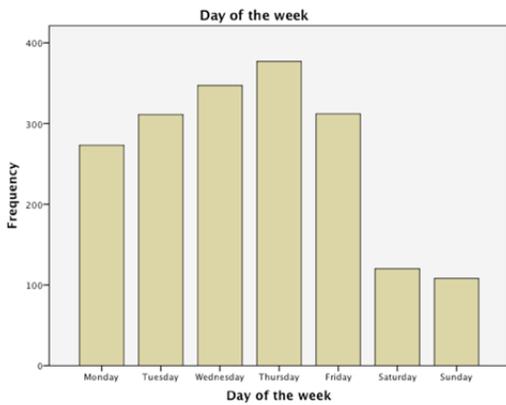*Figure 5-8: Day of the Week Frequencies for Gender*

Figure 5: Male   *Figure 6: Female*
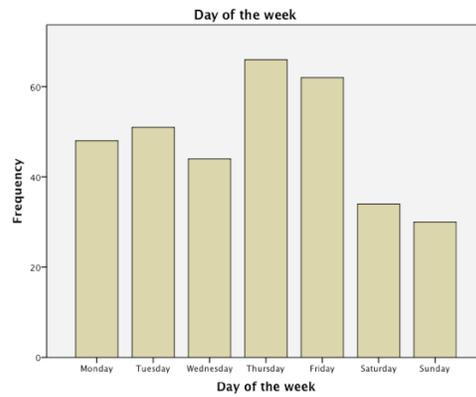
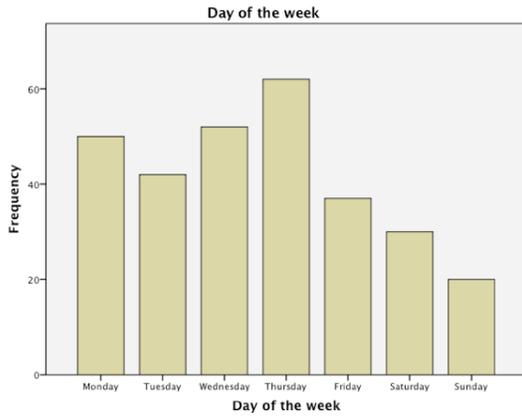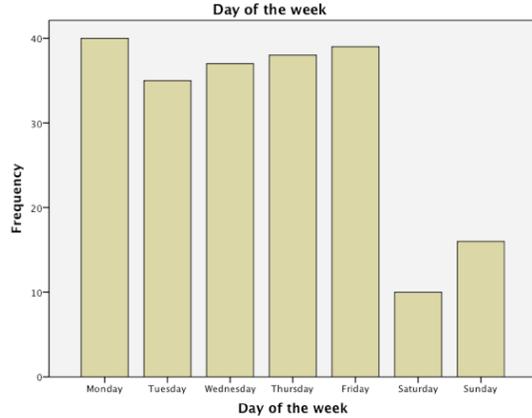*Figure 7: Can't be certain*   *Figure 8: Group M/F*

Comparing day of the week with gender, many different patterns emerge in Figures 5-8. Female and Can't be certain characters tweeted similarly with Groups M/F tweeting very different from the others. All genders depicted a large drop off before the weekend. A chi-square test indicated gender and day of the week had a significant relationship (x^2 = 29.50, df = 18, p $\leq$ .043 and n=2691).

Figure 9-12: Day of the Week Frequencies for Different Product Groups

Figure 9: Restaurant   *Figure 10: Service*
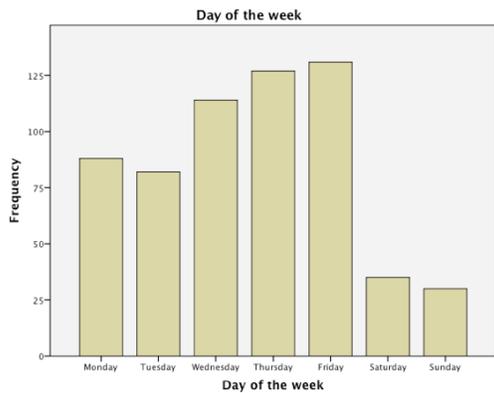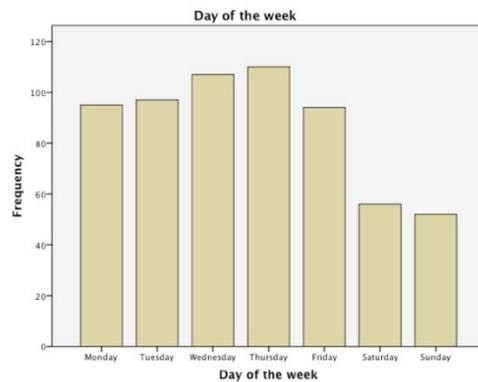
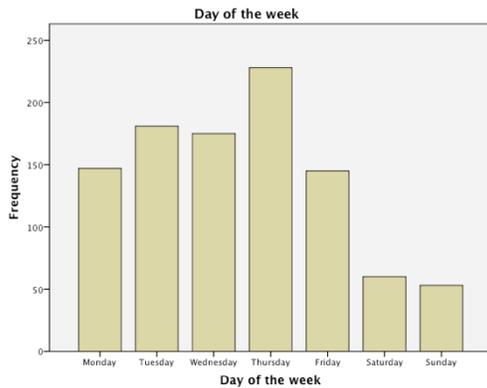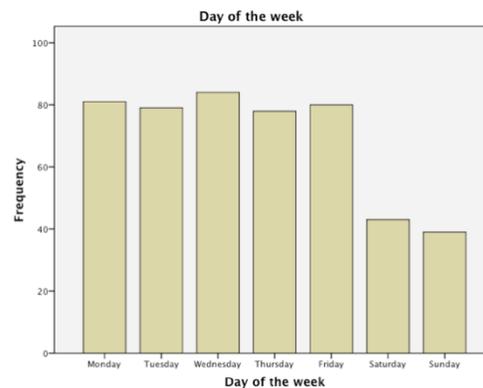*Figure 11: Pre-packaged food*   *Figure 12: Other*

Looking at day of the week and product types in Figures 9-12, spokes-characters of restaurants and pre-packaged food products tweeted similarly and spokes-characters of services and "other" products tweeted similarly. This brings up the assumption that spokes-characters of food related products tweet differently than spokes-characters of non-food related products. Through chi-square analysis, statistical significance was observed between the day of the week tweeted and product type (x^2 = 46.80, df = 18, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691).

Research Question 4

The fourth question asked if non-animated spokes-characters tweeted more often than animated ones. The only human spokes-character observed in this analysis is Flo (Progressive Insurance). All other characters were male or female animated characters or mixed group characters (Scrubbing Bubbles and Charmin Bears). Flo accounted for 188 tweets. Too few human characters were observed to permit a valid analysis of mean tweet frequency between non-animated and animated characters.

Research Question 5

The final research question compared spokes-characters by their product categories. It asked if spokes-characters of similar product types tweeted similarly to other product types.

Table 5 from Research Question 1 demonstrated statistical significance for tweet type and product category (x^2 = 520.07, df = 9, p $\leq$ .000, n = 2691). Service and Other spokes-characters tweeted over 80 percent original tweets. Pre-packaged food characters tweeted over half original tweets (53.9%) and spread the rest almost evenly between the retweet, retweet with comment and reply. Restaurant spokes-characters tweeted more than 80 percent in original and replies, then 11.5 percent in retweets and 6.1 percent in retweets with comments. There also was statistical significance when comparing product type with tweet content such as: Conversational (x^2 = 213.20, df = 3, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691), Status (x^2 = 94.71, df = 3, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691), Pass-along (x^2 = 54.44, df = 3, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691) and Phatic (x^2 = 10.54, df = 3, p $\leq$ .014, n=2691). News was the only content type where statistical significance was not observed. Finally, a chi-square test showed statistical significance for product type and tweet voice (x^2 = 402.00, df = 9, p $\leq$ .000, n=2691). The product category the spokes-character represents appears to influence the type of content the spokes-character is likely to tweet.

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to investigate how marketers are using spokes-characters on Twitter. A random sample of Twitter postings from 20 spokes-characters was content analyzed. As noted in the literature review, spokes-characters provide opportunities for marketers to assemble perfect brand ambassadors. Since spokes-characters are not real people with recognized pasts and personalities, appearance, dialog and action can be tailored to perfectly to reflect the brand (Callcott &Lee 1995). Over time, emotional connections can be formed among the brand, the brand's spoke-character and the brand's consumers (Liao 2011).

Generally, these content analysis results indicate that brand marketers are following Fournier's (1998; 1994) advice for building consumer-brand relationships: Twitter spokes-characters for the brand investigated here are interacting with consumers and providing content that might not normally be supplied via conventional advertising media. Fournier's (1998) research concluded that consumer-brand relationships closely mirror human interpersonal relationships. However, brands have no real existence in that they only exist in the collection of perceptions held by the consumer. In order for a brand to act as a relationship partner, it needs to be a contributing member of the dyad. Spokes-characters provide brands a form through which it can develop and maintain the consumer-brand relationship due to the character's ability to humanize and personify a brand. With proper management, spokes-characters can create the brand's desired consumer-brand relationship.

When looking at Twitter as a medium, it was founded with the purpose of information sharing. It provides marketers with an interactive medium through which they can further promote their company's personality and brand (Parr 2010). Brands have the opportunity to interact with followers by answering questions, asking questions, apologizing for mistakes and displaying a sense of humor. When consumers interact with brands on Twitter, they are more interested in interacting with the brand one-on-one as opposed to hearing and interacting with the comments of the brand's other followers (Kwon 2011).

The Twitter feeds content analyzed here demonstrate that brand spokes-characters are interacting with consumers in various ways. The two most frequently used content types were Pass-along and Conversational tweets. Within those two, the two biggest content sub-groups were Retweet and Response. Also, over half of the tweets collected also contained a hashtag. Hashtags are an easy way for spokes-characters to interact with other Twitter users by using trending hashtags or to drive interaction with current followers by creating a new one. As noted by Fournier (1994, 1998), delivering communication from brands to highly involved consumers makes the brand a productive member of the dyad, thereby strengthening the consumer brand relationship.

Spokes-character Twitter feeds can create camaraderie and a sense of exclusive relationship between the brand and the consumer by delivering information not generally available to other consumers. Over one-third of all tweets contained a link to either a website, photo or video. Of the links provided by the feed, 65.8 percent of the links were original content not seen in traditional

advertisements. The links tweeted were likely to contain video of consumers, products, spokes-characters and ads uniquely presented on the Twitter platform. Forty-two percent of photo links were of the spokes-character or a friend of the character. By posting photos of characters and their friends, marketers are able to show more brand personality and develop backstories between the brands, the characters and the character's Twitter friends, thus strengthening the consumer-brand relationship by contributing information to the dyad.

A significant difference was found regarding the type of content tweeted by male and female spokes-characters. Female characters were significantly more likely to tweet original content than male characters, while male characters appear more likely to respond to consumer-initiated interactions. While no theory was proposed that would explain this observed pattern, speculation suggests that male and female spokes-characters may be responding in stereotypical ways. Females appear more outgoing, engaging and likely to approach their followers. On the other hand, males appear less likely to approach followers, but more likely to respond to them. The types of tweets flowing from the consumer to the spokes-character might also explain this pattern. Since females are generating so much original content, the need to query the character may be reduced. Since males are producing less original content, males may be more likely to receive questions seeking brand information from the character's Twitter followers. The content analysis reported here only assessed content originating with the character, so this potential explanation remains speculative. Future research should investigate the content of Tweets originating from the spokes-character's followers. It is interesting to note

that despite the presence of only two female characters, as compared to 15 males, the mean number of tweets is not significantly different by gender. While females and males appear equally likely to tweet, significant differences are observed in tweeted content.

When non-animated, human spokes-characters are compared to animated spokes-characters, it is noted that human characters are generating more original content. This finding suggests that human characters are behaving as genuine people in relationship with other people. Twitter followers may have less expectations that animated characters will respond to Tweets originating with the follower. Followers may have interaction expectations for the Chick-fil-A cows and Ms. Green M&M's, but may expect Flo, the human, female spokes-character representing Progressive Insurance, to respond to them. Future research considering spokes-character interactions with Twitter followers could include expectations about interactions among the character's followers, as well as how satisfying the follower considers the interactions.

Significant differences observed in other areas also suggest speculative explanations and can lead to future research. Food brand spokes-characters are more likely to reply than service brand spokes-characters. Why is this difference observed? Also, time frame differences and similarities are observed at the same time. Similarities include the frequency of tweeting activity during the period examined. The frequency of tweets rises and falls. Relatively few differences are observed. Also, as a general observation, most tweets are posted during the morning hours and taper off through the day. Overnight hours show very little

activity. In other words, followers aren't likely to wake up to new tweets. It is more

likely that followers receive tweets in real time during the morning hours.

Fournier's (1998; 1994) rationale of brands behaving as genuine humans suggests

an explanation for this observed pattern. The most satisfying interactions between

people are likely to happen in real time. Using the character to contact the follower

in the morning, before too many pressures of the day accumulate, can make the

character appear as a welcome diversion much like a phone call from a friend. The

timing of the tweet may be used to mimic genuine human interactions.

As for the weekly tweet pattern, the general pattern begins the week with

low activity peaking at midweek. Activity gradually falls off to a dramatic decrease

during the weekend. Several questions are raised by this pattern. Some of the

pattern seems intuitive and sensible. For example, packaged foods are likely to

tweet at midweek. Followers busy with work, childcare, etc., may be more likely to

consume pre-packaged food at midweek compared to other weekdays or weekends.

The weekly tweet pattern may correspond with the brand's purchase pattern.

Tweeting at midweek might stimulate purchases from harried consumers. The

weekly results might also be interpreted as counter intuitive for some categories.

Consider restaurants for example. A weekend frequency decline is noted for this

category. Intuitively, one might expect weekends to offer more leisure time and out-

of-home activities. One might expect restaurant meal consumption to increase over

the weekend. Of course, busy followers might be likely to eat at restaurants on busy

weekdays, especially during lunch hours. This rationale would explain the weekday

morning tweet pattern. Future research should attempt to correlate the temporal

tweet pattern with the product category's usage data.

Practical Implications

After observing tweeted manifest content and tweeting patterns for these 20

spokes-characters, a number of tactics can be recommended to brand managers

about effective use of Twitter's potential to influence relationships between

consumers and brands. Among the most notable finding of this research is the

similar pattern of tweet activity across days of the week, times of day and months of

the year. Many tweets are likely to arrive during the receiver's working hours,

especially in the morning. Most of the tweets are likely to be concentrated at

midweek with drastic reductions on weekends. If a consumer subscribes to feeds

from several characters for several brands, the recipient is likely to receive many

tweets in each morning, especially during the middle of the workweek. A more

effective tactic might be to distribute tweets across days and dayparts, thereby

eliminating the clutter associated with competing tweets. This tactic could make the

tweet more memorable to the recipient and distinguish the tweet from tweets for

competing brands in the same product category. As with conventional human

relationships, consumers might have more time during the evening hours or on

weekends to catch up and interact with friends. Adopting this tweet strategy could

more closely mimic genuine interaction.

Similarly, Twitter activity could be spread more evenly across the year to

balance the interaction. If the spokes-character/consumer relationship can be

explained in human terms, as suggested by Fournier (1994, 1998), then a steady

stream of content from the character could more closely resemble the genuine relationships consumers have with other people. In advertising terms, less frequent, but more relevant messages correspond with top-of-mind-awareness (TOMA). Rather than hearing from a single friend very often (similar to the frequency concept of conventional advertising), relationships might be managed with content delivered at key moments or tweeted messages might be more effective if they arrive less often. Conventional advertising messages wear out and lose effectiveness when repeated too often. This wear-out effect can be combatted by maintaining consumer brand awareness at an adequate level across the buying period without overwhelming the consumer with brand messages. When the consumer considers a purchase in the product category, such as selecting a restaurant, the brand with TOMA is most easily recalled early in the consumer's consideration set of potential dining choices.

The daily and monthly activity noted for these characters also follows conventional work periods. For example, most tweets occur on weekday mornings. While content analysis can't confirm the cause for this pattern, it seems reasonable that messages are tweeted during the hours that employees managing the Twitter feed are at work. In other words, if the Twitter feed's manager is working 9-to-5, five days per week, the character tweets in the same pattern. Communication management software solutions, such as Hootsuite, can be programmed to deliver tweets overnight and on weekends when employees might not be in the office to send tweets in real time.

As a last tactical suggestion, managers of spokes-character Twitter feeds are directed to examine the brand's sales activity. The yearly and daily results observed here suggest that the brands observed here tweet in a similar pattern despite being in different, and sometimes competing, product categories. Consider packaged foods and restaurants, for example. Intuitively, it is suspected that these categories would be used independently of one another. Dining at home requires purchasing food to prepare. Dining out eliminates the need to purchase packaged food. Similarly, intuition suggests the Twitter trend activity for these two categories would rise and fall as well. Yet, the tweet activity is similar to the overall pattern relative to daypart, day of week and month. Brand managers should identify the temporal purchase pattern and tweet in such a way as to support the pattern. For example, if the final months of the year, dominated by out-of-home holiday activity, result in more meals consumed away from home, then spokes-character tweets should be used to capitalize on this pattern. Brand sales for packaged food should also be examined. When are the products purchased? If these products are purchased by consumers during afternoon commutes, it suggests the food will be consumed that evening. Tweeting closer to the commute period, rather than during the morning hours, might generate more purchase activity by stimulating brand TOMA.

Limitations

While this research provided data-driven insights into a relatively new marketing platform and how brands use marketing communication assets on this platform, there are research limitations that should be considered. The first major

limitation is associated with content analysis as a research method. While the method can demonstrate the presence of repetitive media messages, content analysis offers no insight into message response. Content analysis is unable to demonstrate causal relationships. Content analysis does not consider how satisfied receivers are with the content accessed. Manifest content was analyzed in this research with no consideration for latent content. Future research should investigate the type of content tweeted. Dialogic theory offers an analytic system for considering latent tweet content (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Waters et al., 2011).

       Also, this research investigated 20 common, well-recognized spokes-characters. Many of these characters are non-human, animated characters. Effort was made to locate human spokes-characters, such as Mayhem, a male character portrayed by a human actor representing Allstate Insurance. However, the character did not have a Twitter feed. In fact, several characters considered for this research, male and female, human and non-human, do not have Twitter feeds. This inability to balance the sample on factors like gender and humanness decreases the generalizability of the results reported here. Despite working with a relatively limited sample, there is confidence in the results presented for the characters investigated. Each character has a long-time presence on Twitter and each character is a highly recognized advertising icon as demonstrated by public opinion research. Also, since tweets were randomly selected from the spokes-character's Twitter feed, these results can be confidently generalized across the entire Twitter feed of each character.

Each character examined in this research represents a specific brand. Each brand represented by the character is likely to have a separate Twitter feed delivering brand information. As a point of comparison, future research could compare the spokes-character's Twitter feed with the brand's corporate feed. The two feeds could exhibit different tweeting patterns. The type of information delivered by each feed could also differ. For example, Progressive Insurance is represented by Flo, a spokes-character examined in this research. Does Flo merely tweet reproduced messages from the corporate feed, or is Flo's tweeted content unique to the character's feed? Is the same information being delivered in different ways? Progressive's corporate feed may deliver corporate earnings information, for example, in very business-like terms. Flo might deliver corporate earnings information, but the character may do it in more conversational language. Flo might also be used to thank the brand's customers for their contributions to Progressive's financial success.

A last limitation is that this research concentrates on Twitter communication delivered by fictional characters to genuine people. It is important to remember that a human employee manages the Twitter feed based upon the brand's marketing communication objectives. Personal factors of the spokes-character's gatekeeper might be influential. Does a male Twitter feed manager respond similarly to a female Twitter feed manager, even for the same character? Are female managers more likely to post original content while male managers are more likely to respond to queries, as reflected in the results observed here for male and female spokes-characters? Conclusions to these kinds of questions require research upon the

brand managers responsible for the character's Twitter responses, as well as

research upon the employee responsible for maintaining the Twitter feed.

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