Tweeting With the Stars: Analyzing Linguistic Styles of Celebrities’ Tweet and Their Effect on Consumer Word of Mouth

Annamaria Tuan, University of Bologna, Italy
Torgeir Aleti, RMIT University, School of Economics, Finance & Marketing
Jason Pallant, Swinburne University of Technology, Department of Marketing and Management, Australia
Tom van Laer, City University of London, UK

Not only the content and intent of celebrity social media communication drives consumer word of mouth, but also the linguistic style. An automated text analysis of tweets shows that externally focused, and narrative styles are effective regarding word of mouth whereas emotional, angry outbursts only work for certain celebrities.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/2531128/volumes/v47/NA-47

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Brands are increasingly engaging celebrities to create a direct dialogue with consumers on social media, and in particular on Twitter (McCracken, 1989). It is, therefore, crucial to understand not only what celebrities tweet but also how celebrities tweet and which kind of tweets consumers retweet more frequently. Not only the content and intent of celebrity social media communication drives consumer word of mouth, but also the linguistic style.

In this study, we rely on speech act theory (Searle, 1969) to disentangle the different writing styles of celebrities’ tweets and how they influence consumers to pass on celebrity information by retweeting. The more celebrity tweets are retweeted by consumers, the more the celebrity is attractive for brands. Speech act theory proposes that every utterance acts in that “to say something is to do something” (Austin, 1975, p. 12). Utterances’ behavior is three-fold: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary (Austin, 1975). Whereas locution is the act of saying something and illocution is what individuals intend to achieve in saying something, perlocution is the effect of the utterance on its audience, irrespective of the earlier speech acts. Indeed, while celebrities may control the content and the intent of Twitter communications (Boerman, Willemsen, & van der Aa, 2017; Knoll & Matthes, 2017), stylistic differences in how they express themselves may manifest distinct cognitive effects in their audiences – notwithstanding of their initial intent.

We selected three categories of Twitter celebrities that are known to be high in pass-along value; chefs, self-made fashion bloggers, and famous personal trainers (Smith, 2013). Utilizing NCapture, an add-on of the Nvivo 11 software program, we harvest 20,993 tweets, i.e. the last available tweets for three Twitter accounts per celebrity category at the end of September 2017. To unearth the linguistic style elements, we use automated text analysis (Humphreys & Wang, 2018) and study how the usage of (1) function words and (2) emotions in celebrity tweets relates to retweets of consumers. We used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) 2015 software (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015; Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015) to perform the automated text analysis. In particular, we used three LIWC ‘summary variables’ that reflect psychological constructs: analytical thinking, clout and tone. Moreover, we assessed construct validity of the LIWC summary variables through manual coding achieving a generally moderate to near perfect agreement levels between coders and the automated text analysis (0.49 < α < 0.90) (Krippendorff 2018).

By means of latent class analysis, we find that there are five different tweet types that celebrities in these categories post with different levels of analytical thinking, clout and tone. We called these: Internal Analysis, External Analysis, External Narrative, Internal Narrative, and Angry Outburst. Results show that externally focused, and narrative styles are effective regarding word of mouth whereas emotional, angry outbursts only work for certain celebrities. The most common tweet type is Internal Analysis, which has a strong analytical, internally focused style, followed by External Analysis tweets, whose style is similarly analytical yet externally focused. More story-based tweets (External and Internal Narrative) follow, with Angry Outburst tweets used least. Paradoxically, our results show that Internal Analysis, while most commonly used, is amongst the least effective styles regarding the creation of content with pass-along value. This suggests that celebrities mostly tweet in an ineffective style – producing content that does not spread as in the following example: Celebrity Chef 2: “I am LIVE to give you a sneak peak at [show deidentified] and give you a #hashtag deidentified roast!!!”. When celebrity’s tweets have an analytical, internally focused, and emotionally neutral style, consumers are less likely to be engaged, and consequently retweet the content. Relatedly, consumers are more willing to spread tweets that differ in style from this most common type. They seem to foremost prefer celebrities to entertain them with stories focused on the audience; as opposed to the celebrities themselves. External Narrative are thus most effective for all three celebrity categories, as suggests this example: Personal Trainer 3: “Sometimes the people around you won’t understand your journey. It’s okay. They don’t need to. Your journey is not for them.”

This paper contributes to the extant literature in three ways. First, we extend prior findings focusing on consumers’ interaction with celebrities via social media (Akpinar & Berger, J. 1. 2017; Boerman et al., 2017; Chung & Cho, 2017; Wood & Burkhalter, 2013), by providing a more minute typology of celebrity tweets and by empirically demonstrating what works best for whom. We find that the most common type of tweet is not the most effective regarding word of mouth. Second, we show that consumers appreciate tweets that are styled as stories as opposed to facts being more persuasive than facts, in line with the increasing attention of consumers and practitioners for storytelling (Pera & Viglia, 2016, Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Consumers prefer stories from celebrities that exude an elevated social status and are focused on the audience; not the celebrity. This level of detail about the effectiveness of narrative style for word of mouth was unknown before now.

Third, by taking a speech act theoretical perspective, we contribute to the celebrity marketing literature by not focusing only on the content and intent but on the style used by celebrities in the information they disclose. We show how linguistic style can create a perlocutionary speech act that affects consumers irrespective of (i) locution. This paper provides a replicable approach that further research can adopt to investigate how linguistic elements influence sharing behavior on social media. We clearly demonstrate that writing style specifically matters for celebrity communication. Not only what – but also how – the stars tweet affects consumers.

REFERENCES


