How Twitter Has Changed the Way Advertisers Communicate

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Abstract

Since its inception in 2006 Twitter has become one of the most prevalent social media platforms, with over 330 million active users and over 500 million “tweets” sent daily (Aslam, 2018). This research project will conduct a content analysis of specific tweets from the Wendy’s corporation official Twitter account in addition to qualitatively evaluating scholarly articles on the topic of social media, marketing, and online communication. The key focus is how Twitter creates what is referred to as a “dialogic loop,” a pattern that only develops in online communication. This paper will highlight how Twitter has changed the way advertisers utilize social media to promote their organization’s goals. Wendy’s establishes dialogic loops primarily by using retweets and humor to connect with individuals, by engaging with other organizations positively and negatively, and by utilizing a character spokesperson.

Introduction

Initially developed and launched in 2006 by creators Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Noah Glass, and Biz Stone, Twitter originated as a phone application (app) and website for users to create and share messages known as “tweets.” These were originally based on the 140-character short messaging service (SMS) text limit (although the limit was doubled to 280 characters in 2017) and came to be known as “micro-blogging.” Twitter’s unique attributes allow its users to communicate with one another in an asynchronous dialogic loop, where any user is capable of interacting with another by using various hyperlinks (the # hashtag or the @ symbol to attach a person’s username and include them in a tweet), and permit its users to perpetuate communication regardless of location, time, or access to a desktop computer.

Another key aspect of Twitter’s success is the concept of the “retweet,” which allows a user to quote a fellow user’s tweet verbatim and post it to their account while still attributing credit to the original poster: “Rather than being neutral, the power of Twitter and other social media is that they are designed to provoke and call forth regular updates from their users” (Murthy, 2013, p. 25). Twitter’s provocation comes in the form of the questions users see when they begin to write a new tweet, and that question is, “What’s happening?” Users are challenged to succinctly answer this question in 280-characters or less, which has resulted in the growth of Twitter as an answer to the seemingly limitless capabilities to communicate that have developed alongside the internet: “Twitter is closer to the Global Village than the Internet was envisioned to be. If something happens in the world—regardless of whether it is banal or profound—someone will tweet about it” (Murthy, p. 20) Twitter’s accessibility, format, app-specific features, global reach, and interconnectivity within the app have allowed it to not only change its users’ communication but altered the landscape of global communication as well. Such innovation has allowed companies to expand on the areas most important to them, and for any organization one of the most important areas is marketing. Twitter has allowed organizations to change their marketing strategies to interact and communicate directly with their consumers and affords them the capabilities to adopt an entirely new identity and change their perception in the eyes of their consumers. One of the most significant changes to the world of marketing include the development of the use of dialogic loops. “Loop” refers to the back-and-forth dialogue that develops in interpersonal communication and appears in online communication as interactions, comments, and chats. In online communication, dialogic loops help to promote an organization’s message and Twitter’s unique app-specific features are helping facilitate this type of communication. The use of retweets, @-replies, and
the usage of Twitter as a way to seem more personal and relate to people on a deeper level, organizations are finding success in these new marketing strategies, and their success is the study of this research project.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to better understand how Twitter has changed the way advertisers communicate with the public and the ways that they utilize Twitter’s unique features to facilitate this process. This research will examine communication on Twitter in the theoretical context of a semiotic cultural study, focusing on dialogic loops as the mode of communication. In addition to a semiotic analysis, this study will use a content analysis of different tweets from the Wendy’s Twitter account that most accurately depict these growing traits in online marketing.

Thesis

The thesis for this project is that Twitter’s success as a communication platform is based on its unique ability to create an asynchronous dialogic loop that allows feedback from the public to advertisers, which facilitates the communication process and allows organizations to directly interact with their customers. The key aspects of creating the dialogic loop in Wendy’s advertising campaign are the use of retweets, humor, interactions, a character spokes-person, and communication with other organizations.

Research Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative content analysis of scholarly articles and text books, as well as a semiotic content analysis of specific tweets from the Wendy’s Twitter page that most strongly exemplify the ways in which Wendy’s has used Twitter to successfully market itself. Tweets that best exemplify the use of Twitter’s features as well as creating a dialogic loop will also be examined. While Twitter is used by a wide variety of organizations, focusing on an organization that has had success with advertising and communication on Twitter will best exemplify the way that communication takes place on Twitter and how advertisers use it to their benefit. While the numbers of favorites and retweets are constantly in flux on social media, the number reported at the time of writing will be used for the sake of this research project. In order to gain the most comprehensive understanding of why specific tweets are so successful, the most well-known and popular tweets and interactions from Wendy’s will be studied. By studying examples of Wendy’s most popular tweets (in terms of retweets, responses, and favorites) this will provide the most relevant samples possible and will demonstrate the effectiveness of the Wendy’s advertising campaign in using dialogic loops in online communication.

Research Questions

This research will seek the answers to the following research questions:

1. How does Wendy’s use Twitter to create a dialogic loop with their consumers/customers?
2. What specific ways are dialogic loops created through the use of Twitter and its app-specific features (pop culture references, humor, sarcasm, conversation, connectivity, interactions)?

Limitations

Many of Wendy’s tweets have been the subject of analysis by online news organizations in terms of their popularity; however, they have not been studied in the context proposed in this research project. By analyzing these tweets within the context of dialogic loops their messages take on a new meaning and highlight specific attributes of online communication. This analysis goes beyond the cursory observations of online articles; however, the success of these tweets in terms of creating a dialogue has already been established thanks to their coverage by news organizations and online magazines. Additionally, the most severe physical limitation
to this study is that it is impossible to examine every tweet that Wendy’s has tweeted, especially in regard to its success as a marketing strategy. While it is limiting to only be able to study a finite number of tweets, the advantage of studying prior work will allow for pertinent examples of tweets to be used to best support the evidence given. Although it is unfortunate not to be able to study every tweet available, this allows for more focus to be on the most relevant information and prevents irrelevant tweets and misleading information from affecting the study. To further reduce the impact of this limitation, the most retweeted and well-known examples of Wendy’s are readily available online as well as on Twitter due to the ability for accounts to “pin” their most successful or important tweets at the top of their feed for ease of access.

While many other companies utilize Twitter for a portion of their advertising needs, Wendy’s has been selected as the subject of this research due to its level of success in the arena of online marketing. Wendy’s has found a niche in the advertising world through the way that its advertising department has used Twitter to create conversation about their profile and more importantly about their company. The inimitable success of Wendy’s Twitter account has put the company at the forefront of social media marketing and has produced a wave of imitators, which further emphasizes how influential Wendy’s has been in this area.

Definitions

The following operational terms and their definitions were taken from Dhiraj Murthy’s book, *Twitter: Digital Media and Society*:

- **Messages on Twitter**: tweets are restricted to 140 (280) characters and are usually publicly visual to anyone regardless of whether they have a Twitter account or not.
- **Tweeter**: a Twitter user.
- **Timeline**: a list of all tweets which are displayed in real time; one’s own timeline displays one’s tweets as well as tweets by others.

- **At-mention**: Abbreviated as @, a means for users to direct tweets to specific user(s); discussions on Twitter often leverage at-mentions in order for speaker and recipient to be easily identifiable.
- **Follow/Follower**: one who has elected to “subscribe” to the tweets of another user to be displayed on their timeline.
- **Hashtag**: subject identifiers within tweets; by using # before any text, a user can identify their tweet with a larger conversation.
- **Retweet**: the act of forwarding tweets written by others; a retweet (often abbreviated as RT) is viewable by one’s own followers. (Murthy, p. 3)

Theoretical Framework

Establishing a dialogue is an integral aspect of effective communication and dialogues are separate from other types of communication such as conversations, lectures, or discussions. A dialogue is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as a “conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play, or movie” or “a discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed toward exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem.” This definition implies that a dialogue has a purpose and is meant to solve a problem or move people toward resolving an issue. While conversations are more casual, and lectures are typically one-way communication, dialogues actively move the communication one way or the other. When the dialogue is reciprocated among individuals and becomes a continuous cycle rather than a sporadic exchange then a dialogic loop is created (see figure 1). On Twitter, dialogic loops take shape through the interactions between users and their tweets, retweets, hashtags, and faves.

This research into dialogic loops is based on a semiotic cultural study using the theoretical framework of dialogic loops.
Semiotics focuses on understanding the meaning of symbols and signs in communication which include not only the literal symbols of Twitter such as hashtags and “@” symbols but also the way that a Tweet between two users has come to symbolize one-on-one communication and what that means for private users, as well as marketers and advertisers. Due to the immersive nature of media and technology in today’s culture, communication is taking form in unseen ways, and framing interactions within the parameters of the appropriate terminology is extremely important for accuracy. By using dialogic loops to frame the research and interactions studied, this research will accurately depict the correlation between Twitter’s effect on communication online and how advertisers utilize it to create the effect needed to engage consumers in a dialogic loop.

Literature Review:

Social media has become an increasingly important component of human communication, and one of the most-rapidly expanding areas of social media is the micro-blogging site Twitter. Twitter follows a platform based on the short message service (SMS) 140-character limit and allows for “a potentially limitless audience” (Scott, 2015, p. 11) due to the capability of retweeting, where users can, in essence, resubmit another user’s tweet to their own profile for their followers to see. As Twitter’s influence has grown, the need to understand its impact has become more important to communication researchers, and one of the areas where Twitter has had the most impact is how advertisers use Twitter to create a dialogic loop with consumers, and how the varying symbols of Twitter such as the hashtag, @ symbol, and a tweet itself have come to represent communication. Twitter has also offered advertisers a way to use humor and interactions with other organizations and accounts as a tactic to seem more genuine and relatable. This research will further the knowledge and understanding of how social media impacts communication, and how platforms such as Twitter change the way we communicate as well as the way language is used and continues to develop.

Figure 1. Osgood-Schramm Model of Communication (Communication Theory, 2018)
Twitters’ heightened connectivity and the level of interaction it offers allows users to communicate amongst one another at rates never before conceived and has fundamentally changed how people converse online. Twitter’s more prevalent contributions to the online discourse are the hashtag and the retweet. Hashtags, which “function primarily as metadata tags facilitating the retrieval of content from the site” (Scott, 2014, p. 1) were initially designed from a user suggestion to string tweets pertaining to the same or similar topics together using the hashtag as a hyperlink. Since its inception, the hashtag has grown in use, having been adopted by Facebook as well as Instagram due to its effectiveness in linking topics. However, it has also altered how users communicate on Twitter, considering the shortened format provided by the site. “The length restriction and the need to abbreviate and omit elements of the messages mean that tweeters have to depend on (their) readers to be able to reconstruct the full intended message from the non-standard abbreviated forms…the hashtag has been appropriated by users of Twitter as one way to manage the interaction while maintain the option of using an informal, casual, and conversational style” (Scott, p. 9-10).

With the advent of the hashtag facilitating linking ideas and easing the contextual burden of a shortened communication format, the concept of the retweet has become crucial to allowing users to create a dialogic loop in keeping with more traditional conversational norms. “Dialogue is differentiated from both monologue and propaganda….the absence of a dialogic loop would render the Internet ‘nothing more than a new mono-logic communication medium’” (Lee & Won, 2017, p. 423). Without the feedback and ability to converse amongst its users, Twitter, as well as the internet overall, would cease to have a dialogue and would instead be a series of individual monologues by every user: “therefore, while facilitating unilateral dissemination of information, retweeting serves important conversational and relational functions such as recognizing other Twitter users and supporting their ideas” (Lim & Lee-Won, p. 423). This strategy is utilized by organizations across the spectrum: “creating and sustaining a presence on social media platforms has become a standard communication strategy among both for-profit and non-profit organizations in their efforts to reach out to and communicate with their current and potential stakeholders and the general public” (Lim & Lee-Won, p. 422). By utilizing the dialogic capabilities of Twitter, organizations are able to increase their presence for consumers as well as bring in new customers. “Twitter users’ exposure to brand tweets led to 2.7 times increase in their intention to purchase products from the brand, and 5.2 times increase in purchase intention when Twitter users were exposed to both brand tweet and celebrity (or “influencer”) tweets mentioning the brands” (Lim & Lee-Won, p. 423). Twitter-based communication offers organizations a way to make “a person feel as if he/she were ‘with’ the communication partner, engaging in a direct, face-to-face conversation” (Lim & Lee-Won, p. 424). This ability to emulate a more interpersonal conversation using retweets has allowed organizations to increase their social presence and has changed how people and organizations communicate online by letting the organizations control the rules for the conversation. With control of these rules, organizations are able to shift the perspective of how potential consumers view their advertising strategy. Using humor and pop-culture references (such as memes, celebrity appearances, and sketches) as well as popular slang, professionally-run Twitter accounts appear as if a single-person is tweeting to the thousands of followers and connecting and interacting with their audience on an intimate level.

In conclusion, when communicating through Twitter, organizations are able to pick and choose what to edit it as well as whom they reply to, ignore, and block. Establishing a presence on Twitter by creating a dialogue with consumers allows organizations to not only engage with customers on a more personal level, it allows those organizations to present the entirety of their brand as a representation of what the organization stands for. By utilizing the different features of Twitter effectively, such as the hashtag and retweet, advertisers can create the necessary channels of communication and effectively promote their brand as well as create an identity for their organization.
Analysis (Creating a Dialogue through Retweets, Humor, and Working with other Organizations)

The most popular tweets the Wendy’s Twitter page has produced involve either promotions, dialogic communication with consumers, or marketing through humor, all of which help to establish the Wendy’s brand and identity. These are additionally served by the spokes-character Wendy’s image, which conducts a version of “guerilla” marketing. Some of the most prevalent examples are the “Free Nuggets For a Year” tweets, Wendy’s “roasting” of other brands and individuals on Twitter, and the use of the imagery of “Wendy” as a mascot.

In 2017 Twitter user Carter Wilkerson (@carterjwm) posted a tweet to the Wendy’s account which stated, “Yo @Wendy’s, how may retweets for a year of free chicken nuggets?” to which Wendy’s responded “18 million.” The tweet was retweeted over 3,470,000 times and became the most retweeted tweet of all time (Guinness, 2017). The tweet also became an overnight sensation, being featured on news programs, late night talk shows, and a multitude of websites, while simultaneously providing free coverage for the Wendy’s franchise. By doing this, Wendy’s took advantage of some of the principle aspects of creating a dialogic loop, mainly; “ease of interface” (Seltzer, Rybalko, p. 337, 2010), which took place through the simple task of retweeting; “generation of return visits” (Seltzer, Rybalko, p. 337), which occurred when people continued to discuss the tweet or check to see how many retweets it had gotten; and “providing useful information to a variety of publics” (Seltzer, Rybalko, p. 337), which happened when Wendy’s gave the tweet so much attention and merit that it became a national topic of discussion for a number of different media outlets. All of this resulted in positive publicity and favorable opinions of Wendy’s for their tongue-in-cheek method of using Twitter.

Using Twitter to allow a user to feel that they are part of a dialogue allows the effects of their online communication to be seen tangibly and demonstrates how a dialogic loop operates to immerse the user in the digital world. This serves to create a stronger bond between the user and the organization which ensures continued interaction and promotion of the organization’s message. However, when Wendy’s set the amounts of retweets required to receive a reward (chicken nuggets), they set the rules and tone of the conversation, which demonstrates the effect that dialogic loops can have on online communication. While Wilkerson approached Wendy’s with a question, Wendy’s response challenged Wilkerson to accomplish an unrealistic task. This challenge motivated Wilkerson to meet Wendy’s demands, which, in turn, resulted in Wilkerson promoting his, and, subsequently, Wendy’s, requests as well as their image and product. By challenging Wilkerson to accomplish a difficult task, Wendy’s also mirrored the same prompting exhibited by Twitter itself; challenge the user to accomplish something. Whether that goal is to achieve a certain amount of retweets in exchange for free chicken nuggets or challenging them to answer the question posed before a user begins typing a tweet—“What’s happening?”—such tweets push users to actually use Twitter to their advantage, as well as to the advantage of an organization or Twitter itself.

Wendy’s has shown excellent usage of Twitter to create a dialogue not just in the form of retweets but also by engaging directly with consumers and other brands on Twitter. The Wendy’s Twitter account will often reply to questions and comments, or inject itself into discussions, often using humor, memes, or other pop culture references which garner significant attention, retweets, and replies. One conversation with Twitter user @inkedsnowflake, asking about Wendy’s breakfast, resulted in Wendy’s response tweet receiving over 8,000 retweets and nearly 15,000 likes. Many of these interactions are catalogued on websites such as Buzzfeed.com, reddit.com, or boredpanda.com, where users can revisit and discuss the tweets. What this does for Wendy’s is to enter their brand into the lexicon of internet users as a fun, edgy, and entertaining site that promises other Twitter users a chance of interaction with the account and the subsequent dialogue and attention that may follow.

Giving the user an experience has greatly distinguished
Wendy’s use of Twitter from its competition. “Research has shown that organizations tend to use Twitter primarily in a one-way, mono-logic manner and fall short using the platform’s technological affordances to engage the public in dialogue” (Lim, Lee-Won, p. 422, 2016). Avoiding this trend has afforded Wendy’s to gain a foothold in the fast-paced world of online marketing, and the account’s reputation for being able to “roast” people provides Wendy’s with a level of credibility that connects to audiences on a deeper level. “Humor is a valuable and effective tool for communicating just about anything because humor breaks down barriers. Carefully disguised as fun, humor can smuggle new ideas into people’s hearts” (Tabares, 2009). Humor disarms the consumers and potential consumers that Wendy’s marketing strategy is targeting and causes them to forget that they are really being sold a set of ideas about Wendy’s, which is that they are fun, relatable, and in touch with the attitudes of people today.

In addition to poking fun at consumers and Twitter users, the Wendy’s Twitter account will also call out other restaurant chains to distinguish themselves from the competition as well as align themselves with other Twitter accounts from other brands which use a similar marketing strategy. In the fast-casual restaurant industry, McDonald’s is the leader, with over 37,000 restaurants world-wide to Wendy’s 6,500. However, by keeping constant pressure on McDonald’s over Twitter, Wendy’s has been able to brand itself as the smaller, but more “real” restaurant that is not just a giant corporation but a brand that people can relate to and joke with.

During their Super-Bowl ad campaign, McDonald’s main strategy was to promote the switch to fresh beef rather than frozen beef in their quarter-pounder burgers at some of their restaurant locations. Wendy’s response, “@McDonalds So you’ll still use frozen beef in MOST of your burgers in ALL of your restaurants? Asking for a friend,” received over 72,000 retweets and 180,000 faves, where the original McDonald’s post received less than 6,000 retweets and 8,000 faves. By distinguishing themselves from larger chains using humor, Wendy’s sets themselves apart and targets a smaller, more niche audience which appreciates humor and enjoys seeing one of the largest corporations in the world being made fun of successfully. By creating a forum for humor and jesting at a much larger corporation, Wendy’s creates a space for consumers to share their own thoughts and opinions as well as retweet and reply to the tweets of other Twitter users, which encourages a dialogue online not just with Wendy’s but also with one another. This serves the adaptive structure theory of communication because even though McDonald’s is the larger corporation with more resources, Wendy’s can establish the tone of the dialogue and set the rules for the conversation about McDonald’s marketing campaign and encourage their consumers to join in with the same goal of mocking the McDonald’s campaign. When the corporations break the “fourth wall” and begin communicating with one another as well as consumers, it demonstrates to the average user that their digital experience is equal to their real-world experience. While McDonald’s and Wendy’s would not interact physically, over Twitter they can engage with one another and users are able to witness the interaction and add their own input.

In addition to using Twitter as a platform to tease and make fun of the competition, Wendy’s has also used it to align itself with other smaller, similarly family-oriented companies and organizations, most noticeably the snack company MoonPie, which has taken a page out of Wendy’s marketing campaign and has begun using a similar strategy on Twitter to create buzz. MoonPie and Twitter began interacting in January of 2018, spawning a series of online articles and reviews about the two corporations, such as “Wendy’s Was Actually Nice for Once and Made A New Twitter Friend,” and “Wendy’s and MoonPie Are Your New Relationship Goals.” However, the marketing strategy was seen through by some, most notably the avclub.com article, “MoonPie and Wendy’s are friends now because the internet is a corporate hellscape.” This article states perhaps the harshest, but most honest description of the marketing campaign being used by companies today: “The confines of their old, stuffily corporate nature long
since shed, the brands have been steadily working to convince us they're human. Not content merely to own our stomachs and minds, they’ve taken to Twitter, cannily tricking us into imagining them as something other than the twisted assemblage of focus-tested logos and marketing terrorism all public-facing corporations truly are and attempting, instead, to get us to think of them as real people” (McCarter, 2018). Regardless of public opinion, the “love affair” between Wendy's and MoonPie has generated thousands of likes, retweets, and feedback which is the mark of any successful marketing campaign. Furthermore, this back-and-forth dialogue sets the two companies up to support and promote one another and allows for their identities to play off one another to suggest that they are not corporations with complex and well-researched marketing strategies, but fun and witty people who like to joke and have fun online just like regular people.

By working together to promote their separate organizations, they eschew the normal assumptions of how their organizations operate; mainly, that Wendy’s roasts/bullies other accounts while MoonPie attempts a similar strategy with a more niche audience; instead, the two organizations are working together and building one another up rather than tearing them down. By setting the rules for the conversations around their individual organizations, both Wendy’s and MoonPie retain an ally in the Twitter-marketing landscape, as well as eliminate a potential rival by joining forces. This also sets the stage for the two companies to join together should a third company or private account choose to engage either company in a derogatory manner. By showing the two companies conversing and engaging in a traditional back-and-forth discussion like two ordinary people, the two organizations appear to be not only capable of conversation but of using the same channels that regular people would, like Twitter, to orchestrate the conversation. Rather than ignoring one another, the two organizations immerse the users in their conversations and dialogue which lets the user be a part of the conversation rather than just being a passive observer. While organizations typically shun one another and avoid direct communication for fear of indirectly promoting the competition, Wendy's has taken the initiative to make clear alliances and distinctions between itself and other organizations. This is closer to how people operate outside of online communication, where friendships and disagreements manifest openly, and, by acting like a person, Wendy’s Twitter account is able to achieve the same level of communication interpersonally as average users are.

All these marketing strategies serve to embed the identity and image of the Wendy’s franchise in the mind of consumers, but one of the key components of this strategy is aided by Wendy’s mascot, “Wendy”: “a stronger advocate-brand personality correlation leads to stronger brand name recall” (Kinney, Ireland, p. 135, 2015). Wendy’s has attempted to use a spokes-person on several occasions but suffered backlash when after a less than successful campaign using founder Dave Thomas’ daughter and restaurant namesake Wendy Thomas was scrapped for a campaign using actress Morgan Smith-Goodwin with the implication that she was “Wendy.”

The benefit of a spokes-character versus an actor or celebrity is that “they can be controlled in ways that human endorsers cannot...celebrity spokespeople can become associated with negative information that embarrasses a brand or harms the brand's image” (Kinney, Ireland, p. 135). In addition to this, Wendy as a female spokes-character is received more positively as a communicator than a male spokes-person would be. According to a study about spokes-characters as marketing strategies on Twitter, researchers found that “by initiating communication female spokes-characters are more outgoing, engaging, and likely to approach their followers in an effort to strengthen the relationship” (Kinney, Ireland, p. 146). In turn, this more favorable reaction to a female spokes-character facilitates communication and promotes the dialogic loop between the Wendy’s brand and their consumers.

By having a spokes-character rather than an actor or celebrity potential consumers are more easily able to relate to an organizations’ message without being distracted by a human
element. The controversy around using actress Morgan Smith-Goodwin as opposed to Wendy Thomas distracted from the message that Wendy's was trying to relay to its consumer-base, which further highlights the advantage of using a character as opposed to an actor. Cartoon spokes-characters are never considered controversial, unless they were drawn before the age of political-correctness, and do not distract from the message of an organization by introducing a potential controversy such as the Thomas versus Smith-Goodwin debate. By removing the human element, Wendy's can shift the focus onto the content of the ad; a person is more likely to have a connection with a human actor than a cartoon, and, therefore, be less immersed in the advertisement they are watching. By having a spokes-character they can allow the viewer a fuller immersion into the advertising experience and a better apprehension of the intended message.

Discussion

Taking the concepts behind marketing a step forward is a risk for any company; however, Twitter allows organizations to minimize the risk while simultaneously receiving immediate feedback on the successes or failures of that step. Creating a conversation takes two parties, and Twitter has let those organizations who are creative enough to see the potential for what these conversations can bring use them for their benefit. Establishing a dialogue requires participation, and organizations like Wendy's are harnessing Twitter to their advantage, but how will these strategies pan out in the long run? Many are seeing past the veil of the strategy being implemented by companies like Wendy's, but will their awareness be enough to force what has been an extremely successful, and inexpensive, marketing strategy to change its focus? Going forward it may benefit organizations to look beyond the ease of Twitter and tweeting to come across as genuine, or they run the risk of saturating their own market with a multitude of disingenuous and failed tweets.

Conclusion

By utilizing a combination of humorous tweets, media-savviness, timing, dialogic communication, and a female spokes-character, Wendy's Twitter can effectively market itself and its brand to consumers by taking advantage of Twitter's unique features and its ability to facilitate dialogic loops in communication online. Through its use of Twitter, Wendy's has found a way for their consumers and followers to market for them, by letting them be a part of the conversation and avoiding the mono-logic conversation that many organizations traditionally engage in on Twitter. The framework that both the adaptive structuration theory and the theory of cultivation operate under, mainly the structuring of the rules of a conversation according to one party, and the immersion and involvement in the digital world by a person, allow for Wendy's Twitter marketing strategy to be most successful. Cultivation theory hinges on the immersion of people in the media they are consuming, and, by interacting with an organization and connecting with them on a more personal level, the effectiveness of that organization's message is increased exponentially. Similarly, adaptive structuration theory involves the rule-setting of communication by one party, which Wendy’s does in this study by setting the requirements for rewards from the company in exchange for spreading the company’s message through retweets, as well as by challenging other companies in a comedic manner and using humor and an “underdog” mentality to their benefit. Taking advantage of retweets, @-replies, and people's willingness to be a part of a dialogue and desire to be involved with something, Wendy's has exemplified how online marketing can be done through modern media platforms such as Twitter and how communicating a message can be accomplished through more than just slogans and commercials. By creating a connection with consumers and letting them interact with an organization, they bypass the traditional channels altogether and allow for a dialogue to be created. Dialogic loops are essential to communication because they allow the perpetuation of a conversation, rather than a one-way mono-logic
where only one party is involved in the communication process.

Further Studies

Twitter will continue to affect and have a profound influence on several different areas of communication as time goes on. Marketing, political communication, journalism, entertainment, technology, literature, and more are featured on Twitter in their own areas, and studying these with continued content analyses, as well as statistically tracking how people are using Twitter, will provide insight as to how this social media platform is changing the way that people and organizations communicate with one another.

References


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Cody Baker is a graduating senior majoring in Communications with a minor in Middle East Studies. His research was conducted independently and mentored by Dr. Jabbar Al-Obaidi. It was presented at the 2018 Student Art and Research Symposium (StARS). He is currently applying for a Fulbright Scholarship to conduct communications research in Morocco and plans to pursue a Ph.D. in International Communication.