


Chapter 16

Two-Way Interaction Feature of Social Media Tools: The Twitter Example

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ABSTRACT

The internet and development of information technologies brought about the emergence of digital communication tools. In this vein, social media have become a phenomenon in terms of creating informative, interactive, and participatory platforms for the individuals. The social media tools have become prominent not only for public relations or communications experts, but also for politicians, scholars, groups, brands, organizations, etc. One of the effective social media tools is Twitter, which has been focus of political communication research due to its tendency of creating discussion platform that allows the users to involve in and interact with each other. This study focused on how Twitter creates the two-way interaction for the users and what the main components of this interaction are. In addition, the contribution of Twitter to organizational promotion was also another concern of the study. In this context, the research focuses on both inter-organizational and individual levels. Multiple case study technique was used as research technique. Five different cases were analyzed.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and growth of the Internet have revived discussions on the nature of communication. The digitalization of communication media has been formed through faster connection and interaction. In this context, social media has become a phenomenon in the new era. The Internet and Web 2.0 technologies have enabled tools that are more interactive and thereby more effective than traditional mass media, particularly, in terms of instant feedback, easy reachability, and direct communication. The latest internet technologies differ from previous ones in that they are both a source of information and a means of information dissemination. More clearly, individuals, groups, and companies can share and spread

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information, launch large-scale campaigns, and even set the public agenda and shape public opinion. What allows social media to produce those sorts of effects is related to its multifaceted attributes.

There is no single or commonly used definition of social media. Different scholars have described it in different ways (Broughton et al, 2009). Therefore, rather than focusing on specific definition, it would be more elucidative to describe its characteristics. In this context, Landsbergen (2010, pp. 135) underlined that social media provides users four main opportunities: to create human networks; to build an interactive space; to use the visual; verbal and audio texts simultaneously; and to focus on the communication purposes. For Henderson and Bowley (2010, pp. 239), social media is a collaborative platform based on online applications and technologies that render participation, connectivity, user-generated content, sharing of information, and collaboration possible amongst the users. In the study of Yates and Paquette (2011, pp. 6), social media was framed as an online information exchanging platform, which is formed through conversation and interaction. As such, it is unlike traditional communication technologies; the content of the conversation and interaction (as an information artifact) can be managed in the online environment by means of social media.

By referring to above-mentioned explanations, this research propounds that social media tools can provide two-way interactive platform for both organizations and individuals. In particular, Twitter is more effective due to its easy accessibility, and potential to create conversations in real time. Based on this assumption, the current research aims to respond to three main research questions:

- How is the two-way interaction created through Twitter?
- What are the main components of this two-way interaction?
- Are the opportunities provided by this interactive platform advantageous or disadvantageous for organizations?
- Based on those research questions, the study specifically aims to find out in which way Twitter creates two-way interaction between the related sides. In this context, the interaction both at inter-organizational and organizational-individual levels will be analyzed through multiple case study analysis. In the scope of research sampling, five cases were selected for their interactive natures.

In the research, first, the concept of interaction and its relation to Twitter will be analyzed in detailed way. Then, five selected case studies will be examined by multiple case study analyses. The results will be discussed in the conclusion.

TWO-WAY INTERACTION FEATURE OF TWITTER

In 1979, Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis created a worldwide discussion system called “Usenet”, which allowed users to post public messages. About 20 years later, Bruce and Susan Abelson founded Open Diary, an early social networking site where online diary writers could band together in one community. The term “Weblog” was first used in this period. Eventually, high speed Internet access paved the way for social networking sites which all can be included in one umbrella concept: social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, pp. 60).

Social media eased the interaction between the sender and receivers of the message. In the big picture, this platform supported a new form of communication that intertwines mass communication with interpersonal communication. Thus, interactive forums such as chat groups, virtual groups, etc. were

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