



Usage of Twitter in a Global Context: A Qualitative Analysis

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Social media has made the world smaller. Social media offers an interactive and diverse platform allowing dialogue between the consumers and retailers. Potentially, a customer can log onto a social site in a variety of countries, leading to global brand awareness of a “brand”. Increasingly, social media marketing is gaining traction and is being used in business to attract attention and gain website traffic with 17.34 billion dollars expected to be spent in 2019 and Twitter being the second most used platform by businesses worldwide (Which Social Media Platform(s), 2017). Furthermore, as Twitter supports 40 languages and almost 79% of its users being global, it is a great social platform used to extract information from consumers about attitudes and perceptions related to a brand in an international market (Bian, et al., 2016; Newberry, 2018). This current study utilizes a qualitative research approach to examine how retailers, specifically H&M, tailor their social media-marketing message in their international markets to meet the needs of the consumer.

Rationale of The Study: In today’s global market, social media is increasingly being used as a marketing tool, making it imperative for brands to know how to post on social media as this is reflective of their brand personality and consequently can influence consumer behavior (Chaffey, 2018). Previous studies have examined influence of social media on brand recognition (Bornbofen 2012; Bian et al. 2016); use of different social media platforms (Cavusgil & Cavusgil, 2012); and global use of social networking web sites from a national culture perspective (Gong, Stamp & Li 2014; Lekhanya 2013); however, there is a gap in literature when it comes to how brands and retailers are tailoring their messages to meet the needs of their international consumer segments via social networks. This current study examines H&M’s Twitter accounts in Egypt, India, United Arab Emirates (UAE), United Kingdom (UK), United States (USA) and South Korea. H&M was selected due to its popularity, it currently has 8.75 million followers worldwide and is the fourth most popular apparel brand on Twitter, additionally, it offers consumers accessibility by creating an official account in almost every major market (Briggs, 2015; Leading Fashion Brands, 2018).

Methodology: Twitter feed for the H&M brand was downloaded for each of the countries each day for a period of 30 days resulting in 704 tweets. Specific emphasis was given to: images, timing and date of the post, subject of the post, number of retweets from consumers, the number of likes, hashtags, and the individuals that were ‘mentioned’ in a particular post. The popular tweeting days were Wednesdays and weekends, with tweets being posted at random times throughout the day. Data was coded and the following themes were identified: (1) Product, (2) Promotion, (3) Cultural differences, (4) Cultural Diffusion.

Conclusions and Implications: Culture is key when companies are expanding internationally, especially, when brands are interacting with their consumers on social networking platforms. Based on the analysis of the tweets four themes were identified:

1. *Product:* H&M tweeted product related information including images. Tweets included product styling information from country specific stylists as well as influencers. Product visuals in general matched the sensibilities of the country e.g. Saudi Arabia had more conservative product images than US. Overall, H&M was successful in portraying the products while paying attention to the country specific nuances.
2. *Promotion:* All the Twitter sites had tweets related to promotions. There was no consistency in the frequency or timing of these tweets, with Western cultures (e.g. USA and UK) having more promotion related tweets versus the other cultures. This is an important outcome and provided support to the previous finding that promotional incentives can vary dramatically from country to country, and differences are frequently culturally inspired (Kashani & Quelch, 1990; McNeill, 2006).
3. *Cultural Differences:* The country specific Twitter accounts highlighted the cultural difference by using country specific hashtags and paying attention to language as well as the tone of the post. Additionally, there was a distinct difference in the models/imagery used in the posts. E.g. in India most of the models were of Indian origin, whereas in Saudi Arabia, most of the visuals were either product focused on fully clothed male models that seemed to be of Western origin. H&M has made efforts to be inclusive of regional sensibilities, however they still have a lot of work to do especially in the light of what happened recently when they posted a culturally insensitive photo on their Twitter feed (please see: H&M Slammed For 'Racist' Advert, 2018).
4. *Cultural Diffusion:* Cultural diffusion is described as the spread of a cultural trait from the point of origin, throughout an area, and into neighboring regions or societies (Lekhanya, 2013). All the countries carried clothing which were similar in styling/silhouettes providing support that as H&M is a global brand it carries similar clothing in all the countries. However, as consumers become more multicultural it is suggested that H&M should adopt its product offering to specific parts of the world to better suit the needs of the target population.

In conclusion, there is still a lot of work to be done as this current study was limited to only one brand and one social networking platform and hence cannot be generalized. As culture and lifestyle deeply influences behavior and as multicultural consumers adapt to mainstream environments, mainstream brands must also learn to adapt to multicultural consumers (D'Andrea, 2013).

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