



Making retweeting social: The influence of content and context information on sharing news in Twitter



Anja Rudat^{*}, Jürgen Buder¹

Knowledge Media Research Center, Schleichstr. 6, 72076 Tübingen, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Keywords:

Agent awareness
Informational value
News
Retweeting
Social navigation
Twitter

ABSTRACT

Spreading news in Web 2.0 is easy and ubiquitous, especially in Twitter via retweeting. However, while some news develops viral power, other remains disregarded. The paper presents two laboratory experiments about potentially influencing criteria on retweeting. Study 1 investigated whether content criteria (informational value) and context criteria (agent awareness) influence retweeting decisions. It was hypothesized that agent awareness would moderate the influence of informational value on retweeting. Results did not confirm the hypothesis but instead revealed that both high informational value and agent awareness information led to retweeting. Further, the influence of both informational value and agent awareness on retweeting was mediated by the perceived importance of the tweets. Study 2 investigated the influence of the informational value of the news, agent awareness, and in-group reference. It was hypothesized that the influence of informational value and of agent awareness on retweeting are moderated by in-group reference. The results confirmed these assumptions and showed that informational value had more influence if agents did not belong to a salient in-group compared to if they did. In contrast, agent awareness had more influence if agents belonged to a salient in-group compared to if they did not.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Making retweeting social: The influence of content and context information on sharing news in Twitter

News is an integral part of daily life: Among other things, news gives information and orientation, builds and shapes public opinion, helps people to reduce uncertainty and helps to create impressions of the world. News is an object of discussions among housewives as well as among politicians (Shoemaker, 2006). Therefore, it is an important trend that nowadays, Web 2.0 and social media applications are much more than just networks for connecting with old friends or meeting new people with similar interests. More and more, Web 2.0 services understand themselves as a kind of news media (e.g., Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010) allowing their users sharing latest news with other people, and thus, taking part in a process that formerly was dedicated only to journalists (Hermida, 2010). This is part of the most prominent features that Web 2.0 brought along: the switch from only reception to participation of the users (O'Reilly, 2005). Lee and Ma (2012) stated that “sharing news in social media [has] become a phenom-

enon of growing social, economic, and political importance” (p. 331). Twitter is one of the most frequently used Web 2.0 applications for sharing news (Kwak et al., 2010; Zarella, 2009). On Twitter, users can easily write, read, and share short messages, so-called tweets. Because of its viral power (Hansen, Arvidsson, Nielsen, Colleoni, & Etter, 2011) and its potential to touch the masses, Twitter has been object of research in many respects. For example, in one of the first studies on Twitter, Java, Song, Finin, and Tseng (2007) found that sharing information and news are named among the main intentions for using Twitter. This might have been a first indication of the potential that Twitter has as a news and information source.

A feature of Twitter that makes spreading news quick and easy is *retweeting*. Retweeting means to forward a tweet to other users, namely, the followers. Followers are those people in Twitter who are subscribed to accounts of other users and receive their messages. Retweeting can be done by copying the respective tweet and adding “RT” to it or just by a simple mouse click. The latter way might be the one which made the idea of spreading information and news so popular. As retweeting is one of the mechanisms being responsible for the phenomena of virality and real-time information, it has been a topic of interest to researchers with respect to various aspects of retweeting motivations and determinants. Most studies investigated either content-related or

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 7071 979 326; fax: +49 7071 979 100.

E-mail addresses: a.rudat@iwm-kmrc.de (A. Rudat), j.buder@iwm-kmrc.de (J. Buder).

¹ Tel.: +49 7071 979 326; fax: +49 7071 979 100.

context-related factors, that is, either features of the message itself or characteristics of the person or the environment.

Regarding the first, content-related factors, a content analysis by Kwak et al. (2010) reported that among the most retweeted tweets news made up a substantial part. They thus concluded that Twitter might be regarded as a news medium. Zarella (2009) came to a similar result and found that news was retweeted very often. With respect to sentiments as a factor influencing retweeting decisions, research yielded inconclusive results. For example, Hansen et al. (2011) found that negative news has more viral potential than positive news. In contrast, with regard to online news, Berger and Milkman (2012) showed that positive news was actually more viral.

Regarding the second, context-related factors, Boyd, Golder, and Lotan (2010) studied retweeting from a conversational perspective. In case studies in which they asked Twitter users for their retweeting motivations, they found that reaching new audiences, entertainment, and seeking for validation were among the most frequently mentioned reasons for retweeting (Boyd et al., 2010). Further, the number of followers seems to positively affect retweeting decisions, as Suh, Hong, Pirolli, and Chi (2010) found in an analysis of a large sample of field data. However, the number of followers was also found to have a curvilinear effect on source credibility, such that having too many or too few followers leads to lower judgments of expertise and trustworthiness (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2012). Thus, the actual effect of source credibility on retweeting is still an issue of further research.

In this paper, we aim to extend the research on possible content and context factors that might influence users' decisions to retweet news. To shed more light on the question what makes some kind of news to be spread more likely than other, we present two experimental studies. Both studies address content and context factors that might impact sharing news in Twitter. Regarding content factors, we investigate the influence of informational value of the news, a concept we derived and adapted from news value theory (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). We focus on this content factor as news value theory provides a systematically developed typology of news content's characteristics (Maier, Stengel, & Marschall, 2010). Moreover, news value theory is well established in the research field of news selection, which we are also interested in.

Regarding context factors, we argue that in Web 2.0 applications, such as Twitter, other people play an important role. Users have to take care of their audience, thus they are likely to attend to social and contextual cues that are available in their environment. How social cues in computer-mediated environments can shape behavior, is at the heart of research on (group-) awareness (Janssen & Bodemer, 2013). Research questions in this field address how cognitive and/or behavioral traces of users can impact reactions of other users. As using Twitter is a computer-mediated communication setting in which users' behavior can influence other users' behavior we refer to research on awareness and investigate the influence of information about characteristics of other users on individual retweeting behavior (agent awareness). In the following chapters, both informational value and agent awareness will be explained and discussed.

2. The influence of the content on retweeting: Informational value

News value theory is one of the approaches within the research tradition of news selection, focusing on the relevant characteristics of events, namely, *news factors* that are ascribed by journalists and that influence journalists' decisions to report about the events in question (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Lippmann, 1922). Research has further developed news value theory, and extended the scope of this theory by refining the list of news factors (Eilders, 2006;

Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Rosengren, 1974; Rössler, Bomhoff, Haschke, Kersten, & Müller, 2011; Sande, 1971; Staab, 1990). Among other things, it was shown that the value of news influences not only journalists but also recipients in their selection decisions for consumption (Eilders, 1997; Eilders & Wirth, 1999). In the current paper, we focus on eight news factors (see Table 1) that have turned out to be meaningful and useful to be adapted to the notion of informational value.

Informational value (Rudat, Buder, & Hesse, 2014) as an adapted concept subsumes these eight news factors into two groups. The first group contains those news factors that have in common that they either affect a large audience and/or have the potential to impact the audience's mind or behavior. In contrast, the second group contains those news factors that do neither the one nor the other. In this regard, Relevance is a factor with high informational value as it should make a message more meaningful to a large audience. Moreover, Controversy, Negative Consequences, and Unexpectedness should also yield high informational value as these are types of information that can change one's own and a recipient's mind (positioning oneself in a controversy; thinking about how one could escape from negative consequences; integrating an unexpected event into one's mental model). In contrast, our rationale classifies Proximity, Prominence, Personalization, and Aggression as news factors with low informational value. Proximity, by our definition, should have an immediate impact for only a part of one's audience. Prominence, Personalization, and Aggression are factors that do not have immediate behavioral implications for recipients.

In earlier experimental studies using systematically prepared fictive tweets about news topics (Rudat, 2014), the construct of informational value and its influence on retweeting decisions was tested. In an online experiment, results confirmed that informational value is associated with the two suggested concepts: (1) affecting a large audience and (2) having the potential to restructure the minds of recipients or to evoke behavioral change of recipients. Then, in a laboratory experiment, results showed that high informational value leads to more retweeting than low informational value. For a more detailed explanation of the concept see also (Rudat, 2014) and (Rudat et al., 2014).

Since we found the influence of informational value on retweeting to be a stable effect, we aim to further investigate whether context-related factors might moderate it. Therefore, in the following, we will discuss awareness information about agents that should lead to social navigation.

3. The influence of the context on retweeting: Agent awareness

In the context of social media and Web 2.0 not only content factors should influence selection decisions, but also characteristics and behavior of other people. Therefore, we draw on research on awareness (e.g., Janssen & Bodemer, 2013). Awareness in general means the state of consciousness about for example, other people, objects, feelings, or conditions (e.g., Carroll, Neale, Isenhour, Rosson, & McCrickard, 2003). Establishing awareness in computer-mediated settings can be facilitated by means of providing so-called awareness information, for example, about opinions, knowledge or preferences of interaction partners. A large number of studies could already show that awareness information does have a positive effect on efficient communication behavior or learning (Buder, 2011; Buder & Bodemer, 2008; Engelmann, Dehler, Bodemer, & Buder, 2009; Janssen & Bodemer, 2013; Janssen, Erkens, & Kirschner, 2011; Phielix, Prins, Kirschner, Erkens, & Jaspers, 2011; Schreiber & Engelmann, 2010). We differentiate between two kinds of awareness information: First,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6838492>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6838492>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)