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Love the Customers: Principles of Interpersonal Relationships Applied to Social Media

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Love the Customers: Principles of Interpersonal Relationships Applied to Social Media

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Abstract

Social media has changed communication, and its influence is far-reaching. Companies have adapted and tweaked their marketing strategies to more personal approaches to reach their audiences. This is especially evident in recent years. It can be observed, for example, by fast-food Twitter accounts attracting the attention of online users through witty personas and sarcastic tweets. This phenomenon is the motivation of this research looking into relationships between brands and their social media followers. Here, interpersonal relationship theories are referenced to uncover what encourages these kinds of relationships as well as discover which methods deliver the most positive responses, likes, and retweets from followers.

A content analysis on 250 tweets from 5 different fast-food brands was conducted, accompanied by 20 comments from each tweet. Tweets were categorized by the following traits: brand personality, maintenance and promotion, and targeting. Comments to brand tweets were categorized based on consumers' encouraging or dissatisfied language. The findings suggest brand personality and targeting receive the best audience reception, while posts focusing on promotions and lack personality are possibly gaining negative reception on Twitter. This research exemplifies the differences between hard selling tactics on Twitter and interpersonal approaches and serves to potentially set the stage for more research on brand interpersonal relationships and social media.

Contents

Introduction

Communicative means of the 21st-century have become far-reaching and instantaneous since the introduction of social media. Consequently, companies must strategically use social media and take a more interpersonal approach in their communication. This has led organization and customer interaction to evolve from a more business-like relationship to a more personal one. Humanity is becoming an increasingly integral factor in brand communication on social media. Many brands, especially fast-food brands such as Wendy's for example, have soared in popularity by inciting more interaction from audiences through witty, personality-driven tweets (Jargon, 2017).

The purpose of this work is to investigate communication between fast-food brands and consumers on Twitter. Interpersonal relationship theories were compared to fast-food brand interactions on Twitter. In the course of exploring interpersonal relationship theories, it was found that Finkle's research (2017) summarized 14 principles defined by prior research. Many of his principles originated from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980), interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Furthermore, numerous studies of customer-brand communication that stem from attachment theory were investigated. After comparing studies, three principles were chosen that correlate to principles found in Finkle's research. Those traits were brand personality, relationship maintenance strategies, and targeting. Combined traits were also assessed to investigate how they can affect likes, comments, and retweets when working together. Tweets were collected and categorized into these traits to assess which traits receive the best reception. Positive reception would be defined in terms of receiving more likes, retweets, responses, or

more positive messages in the comments. The questions to be answered in this research are as follows:

Q1: *Which relatable tweet styles seem to have the best reception?*

Q2: *Do combined styles influence a better reception with customers?*

Significance

The intent for this research is to investigate the interpersonal aspects of relatable tweets, and to explore which methods are the most appealing to customers. This study provides clarity through common examples observed on Twitter within the fast-food restaurant industry and categorizes the methods while assessing the results of likes, responses, and reposts. This would provide better insight for brands to better understand what motivates consumer behavior on Twitter and what would be better received by their followers.

Gaps in Research

Relatable tweeting, or reaching out to customers in a more familiar and relatable tone, has become the new standard for companies since as far back as 2007 (Allebach, 2019). There has not, however, been much research to investigate different ways that companies have tried to get closer to customers and the most effective relatable tweets methods. Interpersonal relationship theories mention aspects of intimate interaction that encourage relationship building, regardless of the type of relationship. The same effects can clearly be observed in interactions with customers however, this research is intended to answer the following questions: What do people like about relatability? Is it better to encourage more interaction? Is it better for a company to exhibit a personality? Is it effective when companies use memes to appeal to a demographic?

Literature Review

Interpersonal Relationships

The study of interpersonal relationships is a central area in the study of human behavior that encompasses a variety of relationships such as friends, families, and romantic partners. One such interpersonal theory used to study relationship behavior is attachment theory. First coined by Bowlby during the 1930s, attachment theory is the fundamental framework that assesses that individuals inherently carry an internal cognitive system predisposed for attachment, or an "attachment behavioral system" (Bowlby, 1982, as cited in Elaheh et al., 2018, p. 2146) that drives them to seek attachment to others, or "attachment figures" (p. 2146). The theory first studied parental relationships with their young and how it altered mental attitudes towards others into their adulthood. The results of the initial studies demonstrated childhood treatment influenced how people perceived others (whether others are viewed trustworthy and dependable), how secure they feel with others, and how their emotions are regulated (Bowlby, 1982). The research has since been utilized outside of child development research and applied to deal with mental illness such as depression (Bettman, 2006), assessing romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), and more.

Eli. J. Finkel's research (2017) analyzed major studies on interpersonal relationships related to romantic relationships, using interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980), and vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Interdependence theory suggests how much social interactions and how often one displays their behavior affect the course of a relationship over time. Attachment theory proposes when people develop deep emotional bonds they are motivated to maintain them.

Lastly, the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model is a framework focusing on external factors that influence the relationship such as competition, culture, and stress.

Finkel and his colleagues established 14 principles based on their analysis of interpersonal relationships: uniqueness, integration, trajectory, evaluation, responsiveness, resolution, maintenance, predisposition, instrumentality, standards, diagnosticity, alternatives, stress, and culture (Finkel et al., 2017). Uniqueness is defined as the personality traits of the partners and their specific interactions. Integration refers to independent partners' motivations to become interdependent. Trajectory refers to the long-term goals which were influenced by the continuously developing perceptions of the partners based on their interactions and experiences. Evaluation is based on the positive and negative constructs people gauge when assessing their partners. Responsiveness is the partners' ability to respond to one another in supporting ways with the goal of continuing their relationship. Resolution would refer to the strategies partners use to communicate about and cope with negative events in their relationship to maintain stability. Maintenance refers to the exhibited thoughts and behaviors that promote the relationship over time, and typically refers to the biased thoughts and perceptions partners tend to begin developing for one another. Predisposition would be the basic personalities and temperaments partners bring into the relationship. Instrumentality pertains to the expectations, goals, and needs people have upon entering the relationship. Standards refer to the expectations each partner has and if they are met or exceeded. Diagnosticity would be the environmentally influenced situations that provide opportunities to assess the goals and motives of the relationship. Alternatives refer to when partners may have to compete with other partners or no partner at all. Stress refers to the level of demand required for the relationship's maintenance.

Finally, there is culture, which refers to how social dynamics, norms, and traditions, effect the goals and trajectory of the relationship.

Interpersonal Relationships and Customer Management

The same ideas specifically demonstrated in attachment theory is applicable to business communication research on numerous occasions. For example, Pilny and Siems (2019) assessed the relationships between organizations and customers or CRM (customer relationship management) by establishing a "life event cycle" (Siems, 2010, as cited in Pilny & Siems, 2019, p. 310). The "life event cycle" refers to when stages of the customer's life influence their needs and services from the company over time. As a result, the company needs to assess engagement with clientele as well as how to alter its strategy over time. The study also addressed long-distance relationship maintenance strategies in the context of intimacy, or "the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality" (Jamieson, 2011, p. 1, as cited in Pilny & Siems, 2019, p. 314). Pilny and Siems (2019) suggested long-distance interaction strategies since organizations do not directly interact with their audience due to "geographical barriers" (p. 315), and the fact that the organizations do not communicate on a continual basis but in gaps of time usually.

Another study involved online communication and examined communication and interpersonal relationships between individuals over time through computer conversation versus face-to-face interaction (Walther, 1993). The experiment assessed 96 undergraduates' computer interactions as well as face-to-face interactions over several weeks. The results of this research suggested when nonverbal cues are absent, communication becomes depersonalized, and also computer interaction builds connections more gradually than face-to-face interaction, but the emotional bonds which were built were still very much the same.

Recent research has validated these findings when applied to social media. Okdie, (2018) set to understand interactions between individuals over social media platforms similar to Walther's research. This analysis observed text message communication between individuals in online dating communities and groups. The researcher concluded users encouraged of the development of niche groups, improvement in the wellbeing of those who may have demonstrated a lack of connection outside of social media, and that social media platforms may be the key in establishing larger networks and communities.

Similarly, the same concept of studying interpersonal dynamics has been employed in analyzing social media behavior with organizations. Hinson and his colleagues (2019) sought to illustrate the phenomenon of bonding to inanimate objects through analyzing customer engagement. Customer engagement was defined into three categories: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Their findings suggested there was a sense of bonding prevalent, especially when positive impressions were established. Santini and his team (2020) used Twitter to further explore customers' motivations to interact with businesses and found they were driven based on feelings of trust, positivity, and satisfaction towards the company. Additionally, companies that used Twitter were twice as likely as companies using other media sites to improve customer engagement.

An additional study of social media marketing for the hotel industry emphasized the importance of social media as well the importance of customer maintenance and proper targeting and customer segmentation (Dewnarain et al., 2019). As it was quoted by Dewnarian, "This has given rise to a new form of CRM which is known as social customer relationship management." (p. 1). Lastly, the significance of emotional attachment was demonstrated once more in Wan's study (2017), which analyzed attachment theory with content creators in social media. Wan

found that donation intention was influenced by the user's emotional attachment to the content creator. In turn, those emotional attachments were further influenced by identification, interaction, and information value. This research itself was reflective of Horton and Wohl's research (1956), which introduced the concept of "parasocial interaction", which would be defined as the pseudo-relationship audiences develop towards personalities in media.

The idea that people carry an internal "attachments behavioral system" that affects who they want to interact with can apply in countless facets of psychology. This may also influence consumer decisions when acting within social media communities. It has already been demonstrated that similar phenomenon occurs between individuals online, in parasocial relationships with social media influencers, and even inanimate objects, hence it can be reasoned the same reaction likely occurs with corporate entities.

Social Media use for Businesses

Varbanov (2015) suggested the rise of social media has given the power to the people in regard to content creation by allowing people to post their own blogs, video, reviews, and more. This interactivity also allows consumers' voices to impact how businesses are perceived by the public and opens the doors to communication between businesses and their consumers. Social media also provides companies the advantage to target specific demographics with the use of algorithms and target audiences on platforms such as Facebook. With social media's potential to reach the broadest audience, social media management in business is widely encouraged (Varbanov, 2015).

Arnaboldi and Coget (2016) further elucidated this point by explaining approaches that should be taken when utilizing social media to reach followers. According to the paper, instead of asking, "How can [Social Media] be exploited for our benefit?", companies should ask "How

is social media changing society, and how will that change the way organizations do business?" (p. 47). Companies should not look at social media as just tools, but as new processes of communication they must adapt to in order to survive. Since the power of creation has been handed to consumers, they now have the power to frame messages on their own instead of relying on organizational communication first.

Arnaboldi and Coget (2016) also addressed why consumers in this new environment may have negative associations with organizations as a result of their connections being exploited for marketing and commercial purposes. They present Adler's Framework (Adler, 2001), and applied Adler's three social forms to social media. The initial three forms in Adler's framework were markets, hierarchies, and communities. Markets would be defined as the simple process of an organization supplying a demand for goods and services to their consumers in exchange for currency. One's typical exchange in this regard with an organization would be the organization's blatant and obvious request to buy the product. Hierarchies would suggest the process of sources of authority forming in social exchange environments. This would be where an organization would choose to communicate from a place of authority with the customer and the customer may have little to no input in exchange. Lastly, communities would be groups of people joined together in a common space with a common purpose or goal. In this situation, the organization would instead choose to be a member of the community, leading and participating in dialogue with intentions of selling to consumers apparent but not as blatant. Arnaboldi and Coget (2016) suggested that in a social media environment, the sense of community would override consumers' need for a sense of hierarchy or market, and therefore companies should evolve to interacting with their consumers on social media with that in mind.

In summary, social media through recent years has been demonstrated to be a valuable asset to consumer relations with more individuals utilizing social media tools to supersede other forms of communication channels due to its flexible and large-scale accessibility. Because the power is in the hands of consumers, who already associate businesses with solely transactional market-driven communication, it is no wonder companies are going out of their way to establish more personal interactions. This phenomenon has paved the way to the utilization of "relatable tweets."

Brands on Twitter

A Wall Street Journal article details Wendy's recent social media strategy in which the brand adopted a sarcastic tone on Twitter, caricaturing their mascot. As an excerpt demonstrates "When archenemy McDonald's Corp. in March announced it would begin using fresh rather than frozen beef in its Quarter Pounders, Wendy's tweeted: 'So you'll still use frozen beef in MOST of your burgers in ALL of your restaurants? Asking for a friend.'." (Jargon, 2017, para. 2). Several tweets such as these were retorting to tweets from competitive restaurants such as Burger King, Hardees, and others. This move, which was intended to appeal to younger consumers, has received positive reception and garnered attention. This has since opened the doors to brands having witty conversations and playful online feuds. As quoted in an article by Business Insider, "The last decade has seen social media transform from a place where brands could somewhat blandly advertise into an all-out, snark-filled Thunderdome. (Taylor, n.d., p. 2)". Other companies have therefore followed this social media strategy.

But is this new form of garnering attention on social media successful? According to an online survey by *The Sprout Social Index* (n.d.), 75% of consumers do appreciate the humor resulting from the pretend feuds online. Millennials especially find phenomenon more

entertaining than 20% of the other generations before them. In summary, so long as companies are not personally attacking their consumers, leaving open opportunities for communication, and being entertaining and humorous, it can be an effective strategy (The Sprout Social Index, n.d.).

Hayes and Carr (2020) conducted a study on schadenfreude, which is defined as pleasure from the expense of other's misery, caused by negative posts about competing brands. The study found negative or snarky messages had a positive effect on the perceptions of commitment, affect, and intent to purchase.

Wittiness and schadenfreude can be observed in the real-world case with Wendy's, in which a corporate entity has produced a "personality." As a result, Wendy's has generated their own online brand uniqueness while creating provocative tweets that have provoked the attention of an audience. This distinguished move alone has potentially garnered a community on social media and in theory, can engender a feeling of association with the company. This phenomenon suggests that it's important not only to adopt a more humanistic approach to Twitter, but also to incorporate personality, as well as have an awareness on the brand's target demographic, and the importance of a loyal following to effectively utilize these strategies.

Hypothesis Development

The basic framework of this research suggests that principles applied to aspects of attachment theory can also be applied to an organization's communication tactics with customers. Analyzing Finkel's research (2017), 14 consistent principles were found throughout various interpersonal theories. In his work, all principles are grouped into sets. Set 1 consists of aspects that define a relationship. Set 2 defines how relationships operate. Set 3 define outside influences carried into relationships. Three traits from Finkel's 3 sets were decidedly chosen:
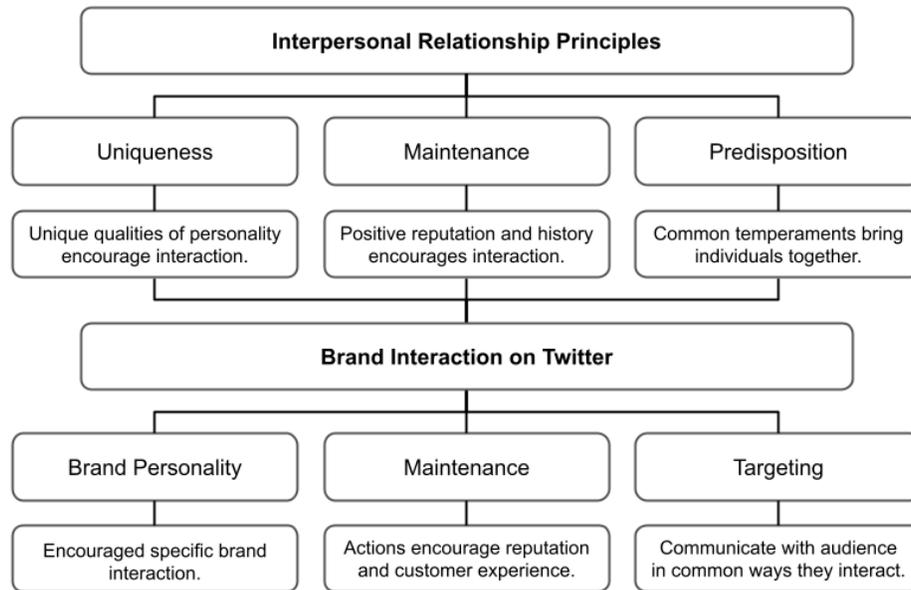
uniqueness, maintenance, and predisposition. Uniqueness is a trait from set 1, maintenance is a trait from set 2, and predisposition is a trait from set 3.

The principle of uniqueness can be consistently found to correlate with brand personality. Uniqueness is defined as the specific qualities of the partners and their specific interactions. According to Finkel (2017), relationships often take on specific personalities of their own and are often influenced by the individual dynamics of those involved. Brand personality refers to the distinguishable traits of the brand itself and therefore is comparable to uniqueness. Maintenance, which would refer to the exhibited thoughts and behaviors that promote the relationship over time, is comparable to customer maintenance. Maintenance strategies serve to promote a relationship with customers over time. Lastly, predisposition, the basic personalities and temperaments brought into a relationship, is the quality being used in target analysis on social media.

Thus, when analyzing three of the principles, it can be observed how a relationship is being defined as well as aspects which encourage the humanistic dynamic. Figure 1 below would best visually represent these observable comparisons in their application to customer relations.

Figure 1

Theoretical framework

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Interpersonal Relationship Principles            │
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Uniqueness	Maintenance	Predisposition
Unique qualities of personality encourage interaction.	Positive reputation and history encourages interaction.	Common temperaments bring individuals together.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                  Brand Interaction on Twitter                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Brand Personality	Maintenance	Targeting
Encouraged specific brand interaction.	Actions encourage reputation and customer experience.	Communicate with audience in common ways they interact.

Brand Personality

A brand can be defined as, "a promise about the nature of future experiences of a customer with an organization" (Berry, 2000, as cited in Kamath et al., 2020, p. 460). Uniqueness is one of the essential elements of a brand's equity, or "the ability to generate added financial value and future income potential from brands" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 269). If a brand is seen as familiar and able to be differentiated from others, it can resonate in a customer's mind, and that uniqueness largely encourages loyal bonds with the brand and creates customer equity (Chung-Shing Chan et al., 2016).

Aaker (1997) introduces the aspects of brand personality by constructing a model for recognizing and measuring the "Big Five" dimensions, as defined in her work. The "Big Five" in question were sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Each of the five dimensions each has its own characteristics. Sincerity, for example, can be broken down in to down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful. In total, all five dimensions and characteristics account for 42 human personality traits. To test this phenomenon of brand

personality, Aaker sent a questionnaire to approximately 250 subjects. The results verified that the five dimensions were consistently evident in numerous brands.

Aaker's initial research has been further expanded. First, Caprara (2001) noted other descriptors were lacking such as "economical" and "convenient." Several other researchers noted there were also no negative attributes such as "arrogance" or "coyness" (Mark & Pearson, 2001; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). McShane and Von Glinow (2005, as cited by Asperin, 2007) expanded on Aaker's Big Five by adding traits such as carefulness, dependability, self-discipline, neuroticism, hostile, depressed, curious, and assertive. Lastly, Asperin (2007) created a bi-polar scale following a circular design where each trait has an adjacent and opposite trait. This was designed with the consideration of more human dimensions of personality as well as adding negative traits such as quarrelsome, calculating, and domineering.

More recent research on social media branding have asserted to contest the previously established notions of its impact on media reputation. Etter (2019) argues that instead of supposing consumers are typically interpreting brand information cognitively, consumers are continually having to interpret information online both cognitively and emotionally. Due to the new social media landscape and the emerging propensity to appeal to emotion, it is now more imperative to appeal to a consumer's emotional needs to establish a positive reputation (Etter, 2019). This is what would thus build a brand's reputation for its audience. Having a unique personality resonates with emotional aspects of consumer information processing.

Hu (2019) assessed brand personality through a content analysis of social media data generated by consumers, employees, and organizations. His research demonstrated that analysis of social media content alone can assist in determining what influences consumer personality. Profiles of the brand followers could be best used to determine the brand's personality by

analyzing terms used. Words revolved around leisure, money, and death, for example, held the biggest influence in predicting brand personality for their sample brands.

In summary, a brand's personality, can be seen as an equivalent element applied to "Uniqueness" in Finkel's 14 principles. When brands have a unique personality on social media, they're more likely to induce more active and positive responses in their followers. The first hypothesis established therefore would be:

H1-1. Unique brand personality will lead to more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

H1-2. The responses to tweets with unique brand personality will be mostly positive.

Maintenance and Customer Loyalty

In 2020, Kameth and his team delved into what initiates loyalty from customers with a survey on banking customers that served to research the dynamic between the customer's experience and satisfaction (Kameth et al., 2020). The survey results suggested loyalty is arbitrated by customer satisfaction and brand equity.

But on social media, loyalty may also be inspired by much more. Li's (2015) research investigated how relationship strategies were executed to encourage customer loyalty on Twitter through a content analysis of two separate corporations – a "top 100 customer loyalty brand leader" (Li, 2015, p. 184), and a Fortune 500 company. Li assessed messages of positivity, or the use of positive messages, transparency, corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, networking with other communities, and attendance to customer concerns. The results suggested Twitter is a significantly relevant channel for communication with consumers, and convenient access, assurance, and positivity were very important to consumers. The brand loyalty leader also used two-way communication more often than the Fortune 500 company. Meanwhile, Tsimonis's

research (2020) adds that when companies give consumers special treatment, such as catering or special deals, a source for advice, or pure entertainment, it also encouraged further interaction. Yadav and Rahman (2018) found social media activities, which included interactivity, informativeness, word-of-mouth, personalization, and trendiness, of e-commerce organizations positively influenced customer equity as well as customer loyalty.

All of these attributes revolve around crucial elements of maintaining interpersonal relationships and are also components to promote customer loyalty. Overall, many of these components that establish loyal relationships, much like that of interpersonal relationships between individuals, are preserved through consistent communication, and consequently, an organization with its own consistent reach to its customer base, in theory, would encourage loyalty. Therefore, this establishes the following hypothesis to test:

> H2-1. Brands who use customer maintenance components on their social media will have more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

> H2-2. The responses to tweets with customer maintenance components will be mostly positive.

Target Analysis and Customer Relatability

A target market would be defined as a group of customers with common needs or characteristics in which companies seek out and serve specific goods or services. Companies must seek their target market to better choose how many within the population they are able to serve (Bernstein, 2014). Kang and Hubbard's experiment (2019) demonstrates how important targeting can be by showing how targeting can affect men and women's perceptions. Using both a narrative and an informational advertisement audio with the variable of a male or female voice, findings suggested men favored informational ads delivered by female speakers but didn't favor

stories in female voices. Women showed positive reactions toward stories with male voices but also showed less favorability towards the stories with female voices.

Hootsuite (2020), a well-known social media assistance tool, suggests all companies should aim to analyze their customer targets. It states "Here's a hint before we dig in: Your target audience is not 'everyone'. (Hootsuite, 2020)." The task of defining an audience on social media is to identify and understand a niche based on demographics, wants, and spending power of the target audience. Some companies are new to the idea of targeting audiences on social media. For example, observational research was carried out on Spanish wineries' presence and traffic on social media through a questionnaire distributed to 196 wineries (Rosana Fuentes Fernández et al., 2017). The results indicated most wineries start without a well-defined strategy and do not segment their potential clients. Additionally, target analysis and social media CRM has tended to focus on supply and demand more than on the interpersonal aspects of target selection (Chan et al., 2018). Because of this, not many companies consider interpersonal components for targeting strategies on social media.

Studies, however, have been done from the customer's perspective. Sashittal and their colleagues (2016) performed a qualitative study on college students and their connection to the social media platform, Snapchat. There were four focus groups of a total of 32 college students who self-identified as "heavy users" (Sashittal et al., 2016, p. 195) of the platform. The assessment concluded that users used the platform to enter a virtual "sweet spot" (Sashittal et al., 2016, p. 195), or a place where they came to feel a sense of relatability and inclusion effortlessly. This further suggests brands that used such platforms could also evoke the same emotions and attitudes of inclusion, relatability, and connection.

Companies have demonstrated an attempt at target analysis on social media through the usage of memes and other recent online trends. The term "meme", first coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976, p. 193), is used to refer to concepts or media that spreads through society, usually through word of mouth. As a result of the nature of the internet, memes can spread quickly and reach millions of users within hours. Memes can seemingly take many forms, from videos, websites, phrases, photos, and more (Cooper, 2019). As a result of its flexibility, this has led to corporations utilizing memes. A Bloomberg article covered how brands are attempting to target Millennials and Generation Z. It said "big brands usually take their ad campaigns very seriously. And while Instagram remains the most popular social platform among teenagers, Dino said meme accounts are one of the fastest growing parts of Instagram (Roache, 2019)." Dating sites such as Bumble and Hinge were among the first to seize on the advertising potential of memes. A periodical from Adgully also covered the growing phenomenon of "meme marketing", the usage of popular memes to express humor. Brands such as Zomato, Netflix, Durex, Manforce, Amazon Prime, and others have all launched successful marketing campaigns utilizing memes with humor. Static memes help people perceive a fun brand by representing consumer behavior, community behavior, or sarcasm (Shukla, 2020). Memes were even observed as a relevant tool in a psychology experiment in which engagement with memes on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit were observed (Jimenez et al., 2020). There was a significant interaction with the psychology-relevant memes shared, and the study suggests that it may have helped quickly raise awareness on their pages.

To reaffirm, target analysis is a vital instrument for organizations to appropriately distinguish its correct audience who will be most perceptive of their messages, products, or services. Characteristics and the tone of the message should resonate and

be more relatable to the target audience. Predispositions and demographics can be key factors as to how messages are received. Communication style, as well as the brand's "personality" should be implemented considering these components. Trend usage, such as the utilization of memes would be a good indicator of a communication style-based target strategy for millennial and Gen Z audiences on social media. This establishes the third hypothesis:

H3-1. Brands who use lingo, trends, and memes that appeal to their target demographic of customers will have more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

H3-2. The responses to tweets will be mostly positive.

If brand personality, maintenance, and targeting are hypothesized to have a positive influence on retweets, likes, and responses as well as positive reception, it could be suggested there could be a significance observed when methods are combined. This leads to the final hypothesis:

H4-1. Overlapping strategies will have more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

H4-2. The responses to tweets with overlapping strategies will be mostly positive.

Method

Content analysis, using tools from Li's research (2015) on maintenance strategies as well as Hu's research (2019) on brand personality, was the considered method. Observing recorded reactions helps us examine how consumers respond to the various types of personable tweets. There is a gap in research for targeting strategies utilized on social media, but there is more research on the usage of memes. As a result, an additionally modified approach was taken to observe memes as a form of targeting tactics.

Content

Twitter is a platform that has been used through frequent research to observe customer satisfaction. As stated in Santini's research (2020), Twitter users are twice as engaged than the other social media sites. Additionally, the platform limiting posts to 280 characters encourages individuals to be brief and clever with their communication. This has further encouraged a phenomenon of short, clever posts from businesses, especially in the fast-food industry. Five fast-food companies are the focus of the current study: Arby's, Wendy's, Burger King, McDonald's, and KFC. Wendy's, McDonald's, and Burger King are three of the top 10 most followed fast-food Twitter accounts (Delapage, n.d.). Additionally, each brand is known for their creative marketing campaigns on social media. Wendy's has a newsworthy reputation for "snarky," humor-driven posts on Twitter (Dynel, 2020). KFC has multiple viral campaigns such as when they followed 11 people named Herb as well as a musical performance group by the name of the Spice Girls, a clever reference to their known recipe which includes 11 herbs and spices (Sutter, 2017). Lastly, Arby's "box sculpture" art has gained popularity on social media (Formichella, 2018). Furthermore, the brands chosen – with the exception of KFC – are in the same category of fast-food burgers and sandwiches, which would make their products similar to one another.

The most recent 50 tweets from each of the companies were sampled. Additionally, up to 20 comments were collected from each of the 50 tweets. If a post had less than 20 comments, then all comments were collected, otherwise a maximum of 20 comments were sampled per post. This totals 250 tweets and up to 5,000 comments analyzed, bringing us to a sample size of approximately 5,250 tweets.

Between the months of August to October of 2020, the most recent tweets and comments were first independently collected and coded based on the initial traits defined. KFC's tweets were additionally collected from as far back as July, since their Twitter is comparatively less active than their counterparts. The data – which included both the post as well as 20 comments per tweet – were recorded in a spreadsheet. Observations for this study were only assessing comments from the customers, therefore dialogue exchanges between brands and commenters were removed. If a post contained an image, it was noted in the spreadsheet file.

Within the spreadsheet, separate pages were made for each fast-food restaurant. Comments were placed at the bottom of each page beneath the 50 posts which were collected from each category. The data from each sheet was first analyzed separately by brand. Then each post was sorted into different categories: posts that exhibited brand personality, positivity, call-to-action, catering, advice, entertainment, and targeting.

Measuring Brand Personality

The measurement of brand personality is the evaluation of tweets which exhibit the "personality" of the brand. Like Aaker's research (1997), traits such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness were utilized as the basic five post categories. Since the five dimensions of Aaker's model also contain their own characteristics, those additional traits such as down-to-earth, humorous, daring, imaginative, and cheerful were additionally added. Asperin's Model (2007), which included negative traits such as quarrelsomeness, hostility, assertiveness, and arrogance were additional traits used in the analysis. Distinctive behaviors already established by the brands themselves, whether demonstrated in action or discussed on their organization homepages, were also referenced for assessment. Burger King, for instance, has applied humor and sarcasm to their posts on Twitter (Ramakrishnan, 2020).

Wendy's portrays their brand with grumpy, snarky responses to other brands (Lu, 2019). Arby's takes on the persona of the "unabashed fan" while using culture references in their tweets (Jennings, 2018). McDonald's is described as cheerful, up-to-date, confident, and family-oriented (Cui et al., 2008). Lastly, KFC's brand is spontaneous and larger-than-life (Smiley, 2017).

Measuring Maintenance

Maintenance was measured by assessing messages which encourage interactivity and informativeness (Yadav & Rahman, 2018), positivity and transparency (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), and demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR). Positivity would include posts where the company describes or exemplifies themselves in a more positive light, such as retweeting a compliment from a customer, or mentioning a recent award or achievement. CSR would refer to posts in which the company demonstrates an awareness of environmental issues or social dilemmas. Calls to action (Schiffman, 2016), which will be referred to as CTA, indicates when organizations solicit their followers. This can be in the form of directions, questions to answer, polls, or links to encourage interaction. Lastly, catering (Tsimonis, 2020), offering advice, or providing entertainment, will be referred to as CAE (Catering, Advice, Entertainment). These would include posts with promotions and discounts, posts which offer professional advice on an issue, or posts which link to media for entertainment.

Measuring Target Market Analysis

Assessment of target analysis measures the company's efficiency in how accurately they have adapted their communication to their specific audience. This study has added the usage of memes as a means to assess target analysis. Therefore, the evaluation will be centered on the employment of informal jargon and the usage of online culturally relevant terms such as memes.

Measuring Responses

This study attempts to compare retweets, responses from audiences and evaluate language associated with followers' negative and positive reactions. Each comment was categorized as positive, negative, or neutral. This was based on language choice, specifically, words that could be deemed words of encouragement, adoration, or reciprocation to humor, as well as sarcastic remarks, complaints, and derogatory profanity directed at the company. Negative reactions would entail responses that imply a tone of dissatisfaction, consumer grievances, and pejorative language. Positive remarks were classified as responses to humor, statements of commendation and admiration, encouragement of positive actions, and appropriate responses to call to action. Neutral comments were comments either deemed undeterminable or off topic.

Each principle totaled to 6 categories – brand personality, catering advice or entertainment, corporate social responsibility, meme usage, negative/positive tones, and calls to action.

Lastly, all of the tweets were separated into 5 groups. Group 1 consisted of posts that utilized only brand personality and no other traits. Group 2 were posts which utilized only maintenance strategies. Group 3 were posts that utilized only maintenance and branding. Group 4 were posts which utilized only branding and targeting. Lastly, group 5 were posts which utilized all of the traits at once. Targeting strategies never stood alone and at no time did targeting ever pair with maintenance strategies. Targeting appeared to be correlated with branding only. Appendix 1 below demonstrates the categorization for the coding.

Appendix 1

Codebook

Category	Definition	Examples

Brand Personality • The Big 5 • Additional Negative quirks • Company-specific themes		The "Personality" of the company exhibited in each post	"Hope your server maintenance is as active as your twitter Winking face (and make sure the crowns aren't paper)" (Wendy's Sarcasm)
Maintenance • Catering • Offering Advice • Linking to Entertainment • Calls to Action (CTA) • Posts that put company in positive light • Socially/environmentally aware posts (CSR)		Strategies implemented to encourage further interaction with followers	"ever wondered how much it costs to make a flame-grilled whopper at home? we've done the math and trust us — you're gonna wanna hear this. get the 2 for $5 at BK. two items. five dollars. you're welcome." (Catering) "We like our games like we like our hamburgers: square. Get Wendy's famous 444 and watch us stream Minecraft today! wendys - Twitch We like our streams the same way we like to make our hamburgers: better than anyone expects from a fast food joint. twitch.tv" (Entertainment) "Support your local KFC and other businesses today by joining #thegreatamericantakeout. Grab a $20 Fill Up at a drive-thru, come pick it up, or get free, contactless delivery. Terms apply at https://bit.ly/2U5LYPg" (Call to Action) We're proud to be a supporter of this year's American Black Film Festival Awards. Check it out Live Now: (Positivity) "We support our Black team members, partners, and customers. We are committed to using our voice to speak up but more importantly, using this time to listen, learn, and act to create positive social change. We have to do more. We will do more." (CSR)
Targeting		Strategies implemented to speak to a specific demographic	"sir, this is a bu ge king. VIDEO" (Reference to "Sir, this is a Wendy's")
Comments	Positive Comment	Comments which express agreeance and admiration of the company	"I love Mcdonalds. I live Mcdonalds. I breathe Mcdonalds."
	Negative comment	Comments which express displeasure with the company	"You guys should probably check on the Bend, OR store since it's been going around that multiple people are very sick and working... two people have tested positive for corona and yet the GM has done nothing Face with monocle"
	Neutral Comments	Off topic or hard to distinguish comments	"Is this applied anywhere? Or is it country specific?" (General Question) "Your vote matters. Get more details about how to get involved from @RockTheVote , @eqca , or at this link: http://bit.ly/2FeFdYk" (Off topic)

Intercoder Reliability

Two individuals sampled 40% of the tweets for intercoder reliability testing. To examine potential disagreements and avoid possible biases, Cohen's kappa as well as the percentage agreement were calculated. After readjustments both on the researcher and coder's part, consensus was reached at a score of $\kappa = 0.83$ as well as a percentage agreement of 92%. It would appear there was a discrepancy in the definition of positivity as well as CSR. Additionally, some posts were disputed as to whether they could constitute as brand personality or catering, and so the coder and researcher resolved the discrepancy and completed coding.

Results

To gather a general insight into how the results affect brands, the average likes, retweets, and responses were categorized by brand and calculated. Upon viewing Tables 2-6, it can be observed that 4 out of 5 brands most often used brand personality strategies, with McDonald's (Table 5) exhibiting brand personality the most at 98% of the time. In contrast to the other brands, KFC (Table 4) uses maintenance strategies 92% of the time and exhibited brand personality only 56% of the time. Responses, tweets, and likes were calculated by their averages. Wendy's (Table 6) received the highest number of responses at an average of about 917 (0.48%) responses as well as the most likes at 11,114 (0.585%) likes. McDonald's had the highest average retweets at 1,905 (0.1%) retweets.

Lastly, comments showing agreement, neutrality, or disagreement were counted. They were measured in percentages out of a total of 20 randomly selected comments per tweet. Overall, Wendy's received the highest average positive comments at 74.94%, and the lowest negative responses at 9.2%. KFC, however, had the lowest scores for retweets, likes, and positive responses by only scoring 38.2 (0.002%) average responses, 44.5 (0.002%) average retweets,

204.2 (0.011%) average likes, and 35.61% positive responses. KFC also received 37.26%

negative responses, the highest amongst all of the samples. The results are shown in the tables

below.

Table 2

Analysis of Arby's 50 tweets (08/2020 – 09/2020)

Types of tweets	Percent	Follower responses	Averages (percentages)
Brand personality	88%	Comments	95.6 (0.005%)
Maintenance	46%	Retweets	178.9 (0.009%)
CAE	30%	Likes	1133.9 (0.60%)
CSR	4%	Negative comments	16.8%
Positivity	12%	Positive comments	67.6%
CTA	28%	Neutral comments	15.6%
Memes	8%	Avg. Comments pulled	20
Total number of tweets	**50**	**Total Followers**	**842,400**

Note. Percentages of Responses, Retweets, and Likes based on total followers

Table 3

Analysis of Burger King's 50 tweets (08/2020 – 09/2020)

Types of tweets	Percent	Follower responses	Averages (percentages)
Brand personality	94%	Comments	129.7 (0.007%)
Maintenance	54%	Retweets	275.2 (0.014%)
CAE	26%	Likes	1717.1 (0.090%)
CSR	1%	Negative comments	21.47%
Positivity	26%	Positive comments	62.07%
CTA	30%	Neutral comments	16.46%
Memes	16%	Avg. Comments pulled	20
Total number of tweets	**50**	**Total Followers**	**1,900,000**

Note. Percentages of Responses, Retweets, and Likes based on total followers

Table 4

Analysis of KFC's 50 tweets (08/2020 – 09/2020)

Types of tweets	Percent	Follower responses	Averages (percentages)

Brand personality	56%	Comments	38.2 (0.002%)
Maintenance	92%	Retweets	44.5 (0.002%)
CAE	46%	Likes	204.2 (0.011%)
CSR	26%	Negative comments	37.26%
Positivity	54%	Positive comments	35.61%
CTA	62%	Neutral comments	27.12%
Memes	0%	Avg. Comments pulled	20
Total number of tweets	**50**	**Total Followers**	**1,400,000**

Note. Percentages of Responses, Retweets, and Likes based on total followers

Table 5

Analysis of McDonald's 50 tweets (08/2020 – 09/2020)

Types of tweets	Percent	Follower responses	Averages (percentages)
Brand personality	98%	Comments	446.5 (0.024%)
Maintenance	32%	Retweets	1904.8 (0.1%)
CAE	8%	Likes	8894.3 (0.468%)
CSR	0%	Negative comments	18.10%
Positivity	6%	Positive comments	67.35%
CTA	24%	Neutral comments	14.54%
Memes	24%	Avg. Comments pulled	20
Total number of tweets	**50**	**Total Followers**	**3,700,000**

Note. Percentages of Responses, Retweets, and Likes based on total followers

Table 6

Analysis of Wendy's 50 tweets (08/2020 – 09/2020)

Types of tweets	Percent	Follower responses	Average (percentages)
Brand personality	90%	Comments	917.48 (0.048%)
Maintenance	70%	Retweets	849.5 (0.045%)
CAE	44%	Likes	11114.42 (0.585%)
CSR	2%	Negative comments	9.15%
Positivity	16%	Positive comments	74.94%
CTA	54%	Neutral comments	15.90%
Memes	6%	Avg. Comments pulled	20
Total Number of Tweets	**50**	**Total Followers**	**3,800,000**

Note. Percentages of Responses, Retweets, and Likes based on total followers

Hypothesis Testing

Tweets from all brands were separated by traits and then compared to tweets that did not exhibit the trait being analyzed. Total responses, retweets, and likes were averaged, and positive, negative, and neutral responses were averaged into percentages from a total of 20 comments. All of the results were then assessed for significance using an F-test to verify validity ($\alpha = 0.05$).
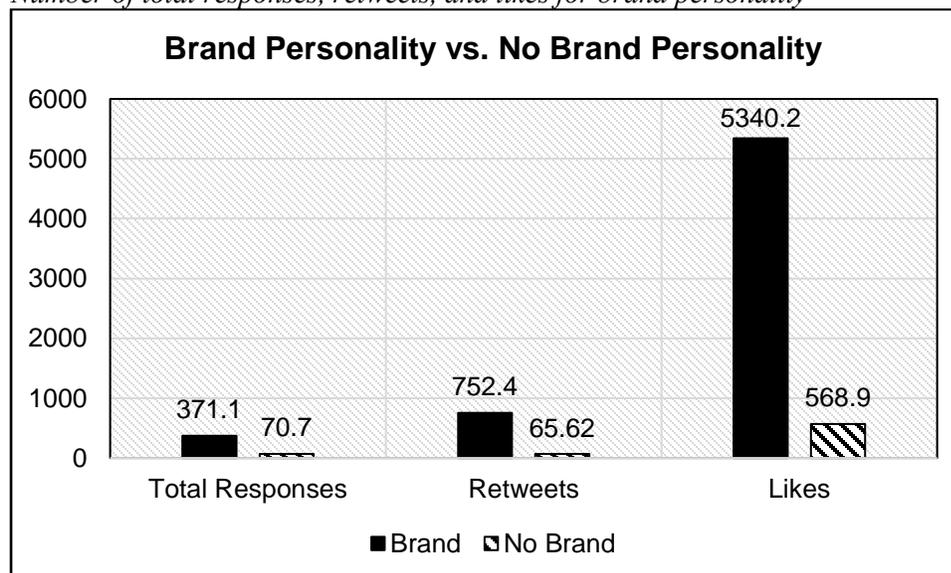
Brand Personality

H1-1. Unique brand personality will lead to more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

Thirty-seven tweets that did not demonstrate brand personality were compared to the 211 which demonstrated brand personality. Posts with brand personality received an average of 371 responses, whereas posts with no brand personality received an average of 70 responses. Brand personality also received 752 retweets, while no brand personality received only 65. Lastly, posts with brand personality received 89% more likes than a post without brand personality, averaging 5,340 likes to 569 likes. This can all be observed in Figure 2 in the bar graph below.

Figure 2

*Number of total responses, retweets, and likes for brand personality*

H1-2. The responses to tweets with brand personality will be mostly positive.

Results for H1-2 showed brand personality received more positive comments than posts with no brand personality. Brand personality received 58.27% positive reception out of an average of 20 comments, whereas posts with no brand personality received 37.30% positive reception, 21% less than posts with brand personality. Brand personality showed negative reception 15.50% of the time in contrast to no brand personality receiving 26.22% negative reception. This means brand personality received 11% less negative comments than posts with no brand personality. Lastly, brand personality received neutral responses 14.98% of the time while no brand personality received neutral responses 20.54% of the time. The bar graph in Figure 3 below visually represents the results.

Figure 3

Positive, negative, and neutral responses for brand personality vs. no brand personality
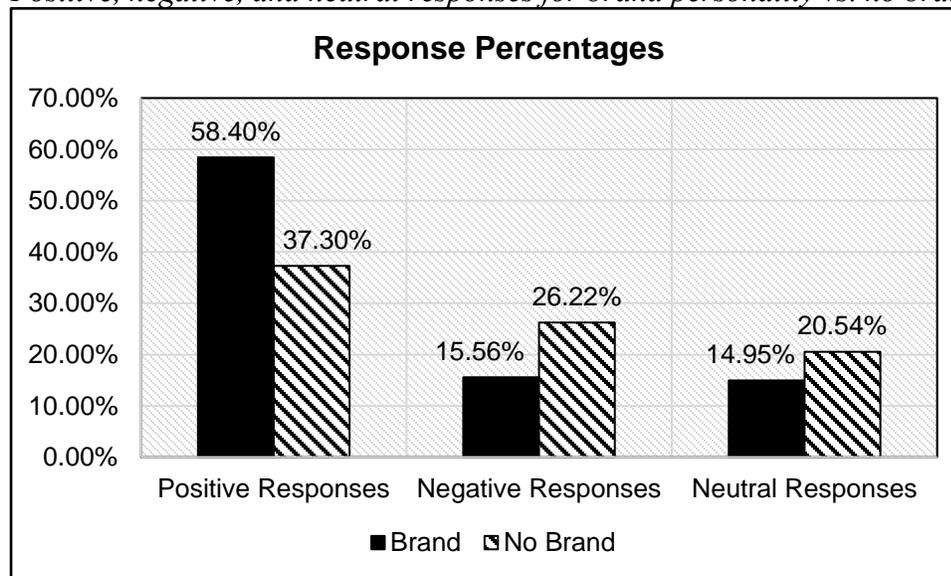
F-testing resulted in significance found for likes (p = 0.04), signifying brand personality has an effect on likes. There was no significance found for total responses received on each tweet (*p* = 0.35), or retweets (*p* = 0.26). Results also showed a considerable significance for positive

responses ($p < 0.001$), suggesting brand personality also effects positive reception. Last but not

least, neutral responses ($p = 0.35$) showed no significance. Therefore, due to the significance

being demonstrated in positive responses and likes, these results can be seen as supportive of

both the H1-1b and H1-2 hypothesis. H1-1a and H1-1c were not supported. All F-test results can

be viewed in Table 7 below.

Table 7

F-test result for Brand personality

| Variable	F	F-Crit	p-value
Responses	0.88	3.88	0.35
Retweets	1.29	3.88	0.26
Likes	4.28	3.88	0.04
Positive	19.84	3.88	0.00001
Negative	0.22	3.88	0.64

Maintenance

H2-1. Brands who use customer maintenance components on their social media will have more

a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

The first maintenance strategy assessed was positivity. There was a total of 58 posts that

portrayed companies in a positive light compared to the 190 neutral posts. Positive messages

earned more responses, with 273 more responses than 374 responses received by posts with

neutral messages. Neutral messages on the other hand, received more retweets as well as likes

than positive messages. Positive messages received 162 retweets while neutral messages earned

797. In comparison, positive messages also received 2,117 likes while neutral messages earned

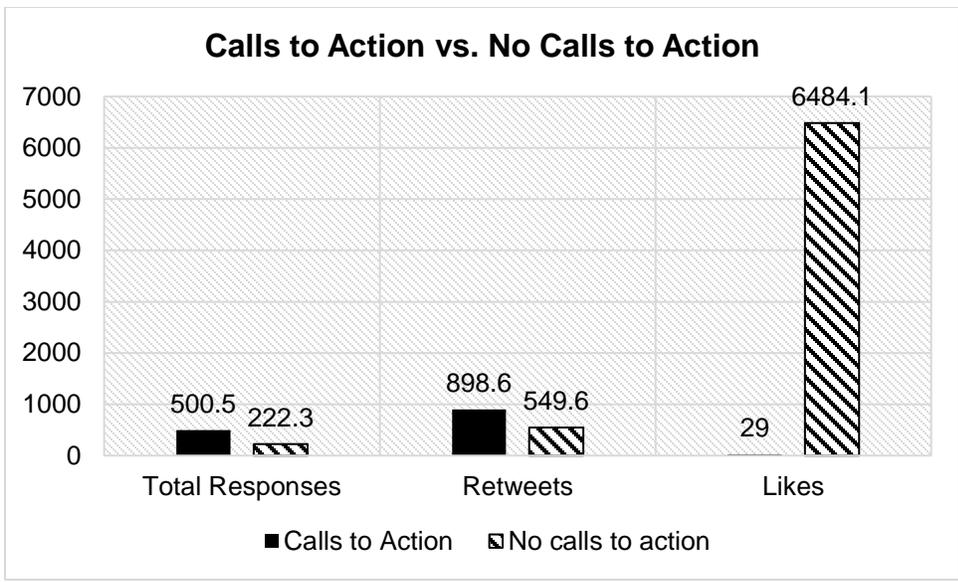5,170. Figure 4 demonstrates this data below.

Figure 4

Number of Total Responses, Retweets, and Likes for Positivity

Positive vs. Neutral Messages
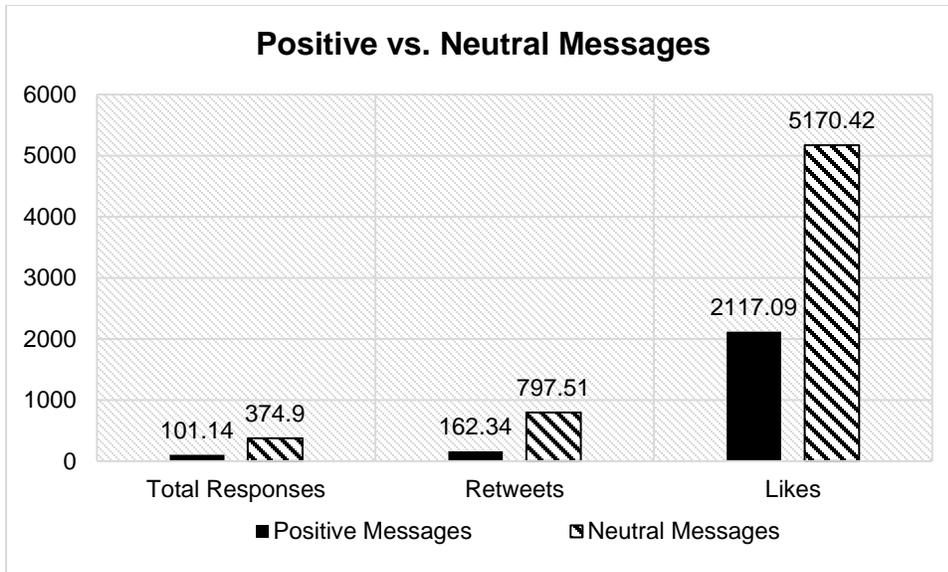
Next maintenance strategy analyzed was call to action. Collected were 99 posts that demonstrated a call to action, and 241 posts that demonstrated no call to action. (Figure 5) Call to action received an average total of 500 responses, while tweets with no calls to action received an average of 222 responses. Call to action tweets (898.6) additionally showed slightly higher averages for retweets than no calls to action (549.6) by about 349 more retweets. Lastly, posts without calls to action (6484.1) received a substantially higher average of likes than calls to action (29).
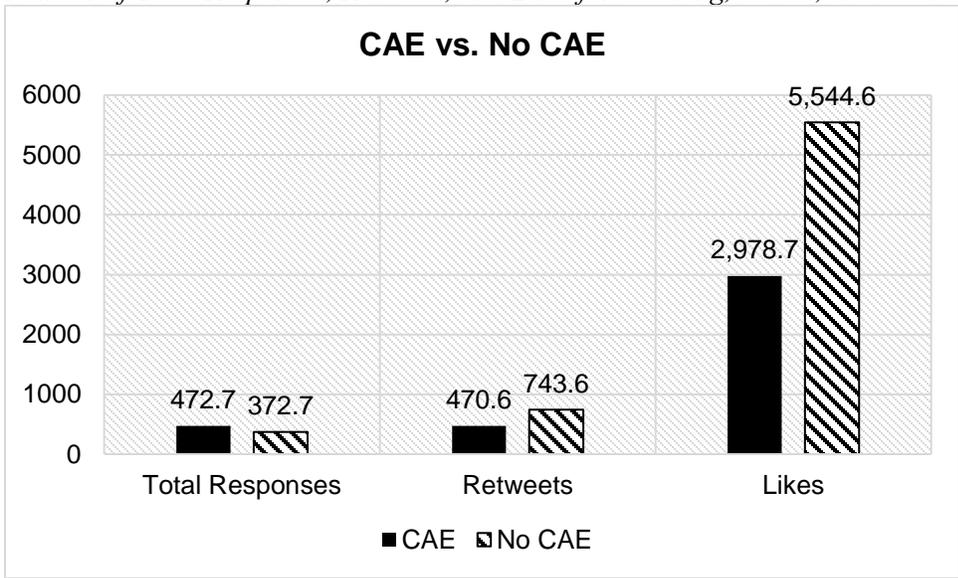
Figure 5

Number of Total Responses, Retweets, and Likes for calls to action

Calls to Action vs. No Calls to Action

Legend: Calls to Action ▪   No calls to action ▨

X-axis categories: Total Responses, Retweets, Likes
Values shown: Total Responses — 500.5, 222.3; Retweets — 898.6, 549.6; Likes — 29, 6484.1

Lastly, a total of 77 posts demonstrating catering, advice and, entertainment (CAE) were compared to the 182 posts which demonstrated no CAE. As shown in Figure 6, CAE (472.73) had slightly more responses than no CAE (372.69). Retweets with no CAE (743.55), however, showed higher numbers of average retweets than CAE (470.56). Posts with no CAE (5,545) nonetheless averaged 30.11% more likes than CAE (2,978).

Figure 6

Number of Total Responses, Retweets, and Likes for Catering, advice, and entertainment (CAE)

CAE vs. No CAE

Legend: CAE ▪   No CAE ▨

X-axis categories: Total Responses, Retweets, Likes
Values shown: Total Responses — 472.7, 372.7; Retweets — 470.6, 743.6; Likes — 2,978.7, 5,544.6

H2-2. The responses to tweets with customer maintenance components will be mostly positive.

Starting off by going over the first trait of positivity once more, neutral messages (58.31%) earned 13.31% more positive responses than tweets with positive messages (45%). Positive messages (23.25%) also received more negative responses than neutral responses (15.32%). Positive messages received neutral responses 16.58% of the time while neutral messages received neutral responses 15.56% of the time. Figures 7 below illustrate this data.

Figure 7

Positive, Negative, and Neutral responses for Positivity
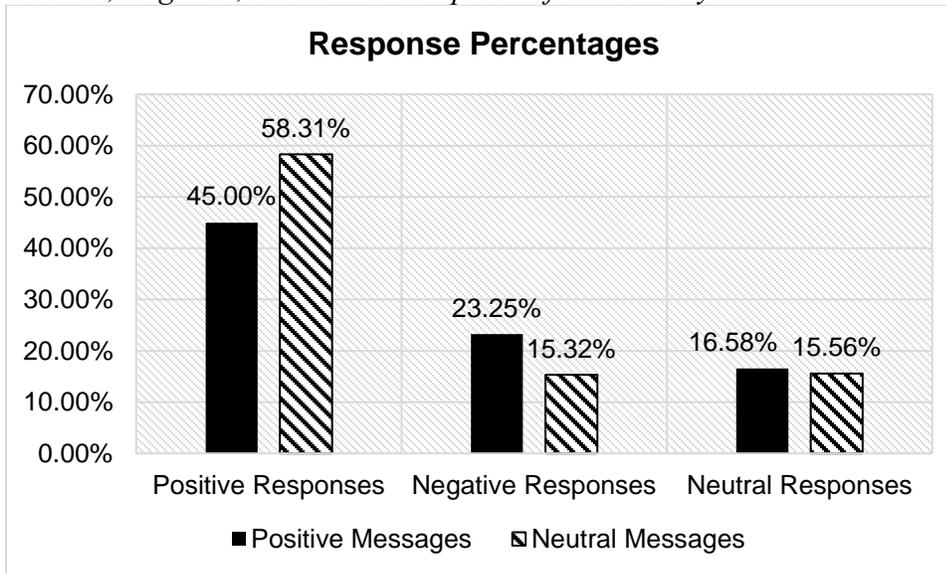
Calls to action received 50.93% positive reception, while no calls to action received 58.67% positive reception, earning 7.74% more than call to action (Figure 8). Calls to action (19.07%) received 4.94% more negative reception than no calls to action (14.13%). Calls to action received 17.63% neutral responses while no calls to action received 14.13%.

Figure 8

Positive, Negative, and Neutral responses for calls to action

Response Percentages
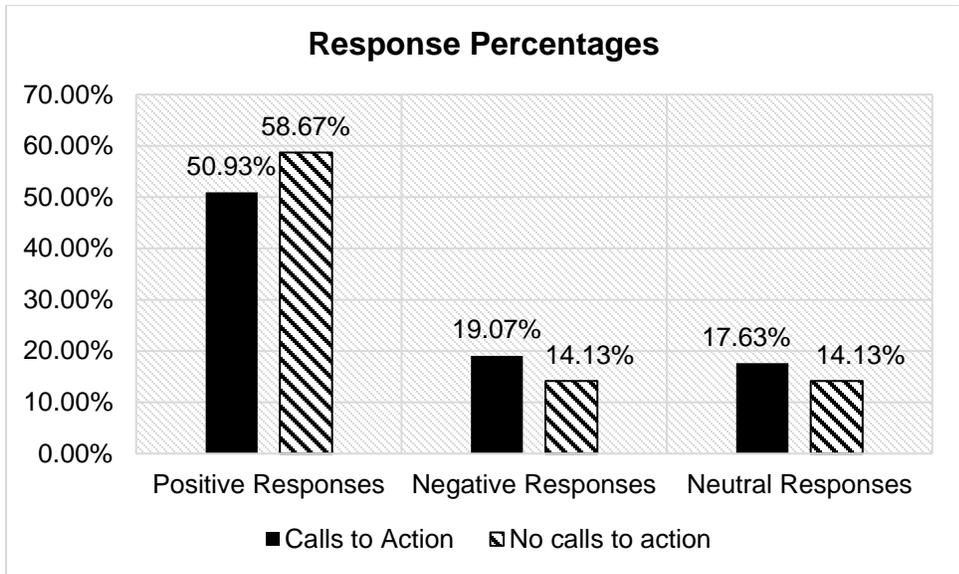
Lastly, CAE (50%) received fewer positive comments than posts with no CAE (57.90%) by 7.9%. Additionally, CAE (19.34%) received more negative reception than no CAE (16.22%), receiving 3.12% more negative responses. Lastly, CAE received 19.21% neutral responses while no CAE received 14.25% neutral responses (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Positive, Negative, and Neutral responses for catering, advice, and entertainment (CAE)

Response Percentages
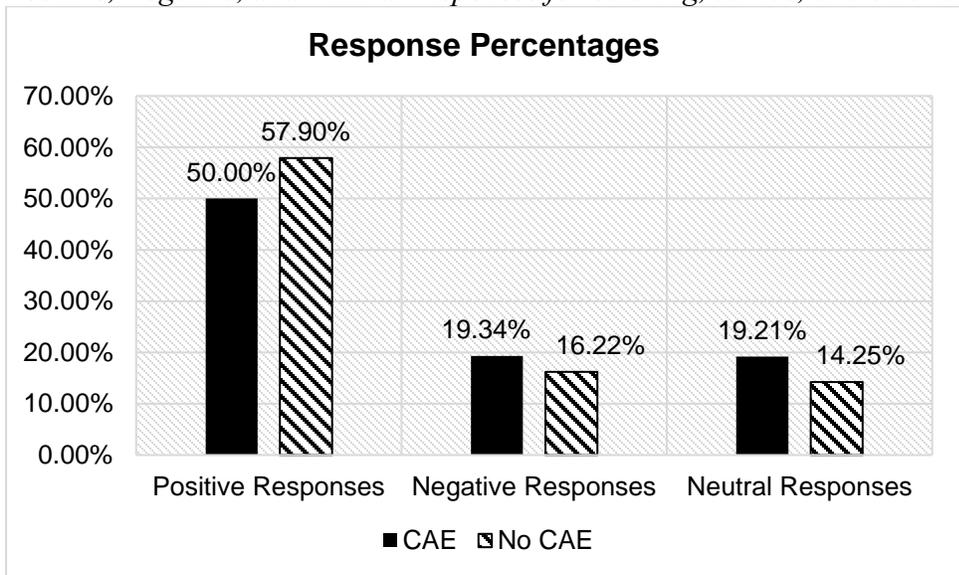
F-test results (Table 8) suggests positivity has no effect total responses ($p = 0.28$), retweets ($p = 0.21$), or total likes ($p = 0.10$). No significance was found in the number of positive responses ($p = 0.83$) as well, however, there were significant results for negative responses, with p = 0.001, indicating positivity influences negative responses.

Table 8

F-test result for Positivity

Variable	F	F-Crit	p-value
Responses	1.17	3.88	0.28
Retweets	1.57	3.88	0.21
Likes	2.68	3.88	0.1
Positive	0.044	3.88	0.83
Negative	11.16	3.88	0.001

The next F-test results, which were for calls to action (Table 9), showed that calls to action had no effect on total responses, ($p = 0.11$), or retweets, ($p = 0.33$). Likes ($p = 0.03$), however, did show significance, indicating an influence from no calls to action. There were also no significant results for positive responses ($p = 0.9$), but results suggested calls to action did have an effect on negative responses, ($p = 0.007$).

Table 9

F-test result for calls to action

Variable	F	F-Crit	p-value
Responses	2.52	3.88	0.11
Retweets	0.95	3.88	0.33
Likes	4.71	3.88	0.03
Positive	0.02	3.88	0.9
Negative	7.25	3.88	0.007

Lastly, CAE F-test results (table 10) demonstrated no significance effect was present for total responses ($p = 0.74$), or retweets ($p = 0.55$). Despite the significant difference shown in Figure 4, results did not imply likes were affected by CAE ($p = 0.17$). Positive ($p = 0.89$), negative ($p = 0.15$), or neutral responses ($p = 0.74$) showed no significance as well. None of these results would support H1-1 or H1-2.

Table 10

F-test result for catering, advice, and entertainment (CAE)

Variable	F	F-Crit	p-value
Responses	0.1	3.88	0.74
Retweets	0.36	3.88	0.55
Likes	1.94	3.88	0.17
Positive	0.02	3.88	0.89
Negative	2.07	3.88	0.15

Target

H3-1. Brands who use lingo, trends, and memes that appeal to their target demographic of

customers will have more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

Tweets which demonstrated meme usages totaled to 27 results while the latter totaled to

221 results. Figure 10 demonstrates there were about twice as many likes for tweets with

targeting (7,999) as there were for tweets without targeting (4,024). Targeting also received more

retweets (888) than no targeting (620), and less responses (237) than no targeting (320).

Figure 10

Number of Total Responses, Retweets, and Likes for targeting
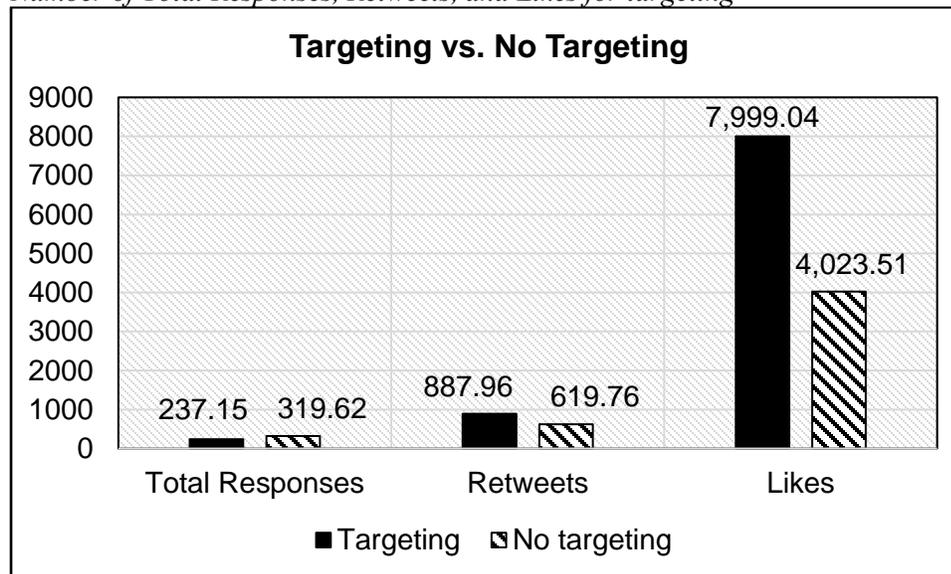
H3-2. The responses to tweets that appeal to their target demographic will be mostly positive.

Tweets demonstrating a targeting strategy (65.93%) showed 12.02% more positive reception than posts which did not (53.90%). Targeting (16.48%) received only 0.76% less negative reception than no targeting (17.24%). Lastly, targeting received 14.07% neutral responses while no targeting received 16% neutral responses (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Positive, Negative, and Neutral responses for targeting
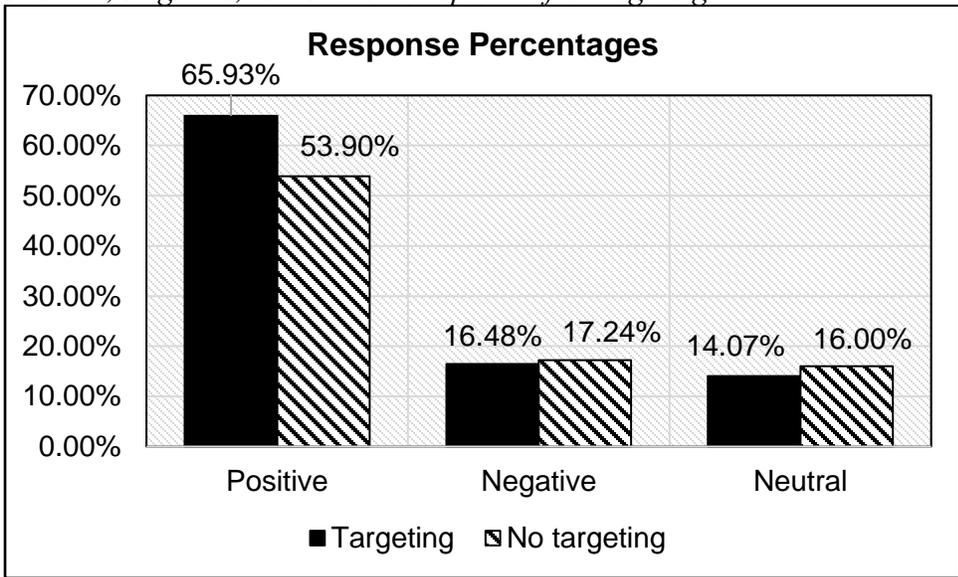
There were no significant differences in negative responses ($p = 0.82$), total responses ($p = 0.81$), or retweets ($p = 0.7$). Despite how many more likes targeting had, results did not indicate there was any significant effect from targeting ($p = 0.12$). Positive responses ($p = 0.03$) showed significant results, but there were no significant results for negative responses ($p = 0.82$). Table 11 shows these results are not supportive of hypothesis H3-1, but are supportive of hypothesis H3-2.

Table 11

F-test result for targeting

Variable	F	F-Crit	p-value
Responses	0.06	3.88	0.81
Retweets	0.15	3.88	0.7

| Likes	2.46	3.88	0.12
Positive	4.64	3.88	0.03
Negative	0.053	3.88	0.82

Combined Strategies

Eighty two instances of only brand personality made up group 1. Thirty-seven isolated instances of maintenance made group 2. Group 3 (maintenance/branding) totaled at 100. Group 4 consisted of combined instances of targeting and branding and totaled to 17 observations. Lastly, group 5, or instances in which all traits were used, totaled to 10 observations.

H4-1. Overlapping strategies will have more a) retweets, b) likes, or c) responses from followers.

Group 4, or branding/targeting, lead with the highest average of likes (9,446) as well as retweets (1,164). The second highest likes were Group 1, branding, with 5,878 average likes, followed by group 5, the category with all traits, at 5,540. Group 3, or maintenance/branding, received the second highest average of retweets (955.6) and had the highest average responses (514.3). Group 5 (all) had the second highest average of retweets (418.8), followed by group 1 (branding) (442), and group 2 (maintenance) (65.6). Group 4 (target/branding) had the second highest average responses (259.2), followed by group 5 (all) (199.7), group 1 (branding) (195.6), and group 2 (maintenance) (70.7). It appears group 2, maintenance, would have all of the lowest percentages. Figure 12 demonstrates below.

Figure 12

Number of Total Responses, Retweets, and Likes for combined traits

**Combined Strategies Responses, Retweets, and Likes**
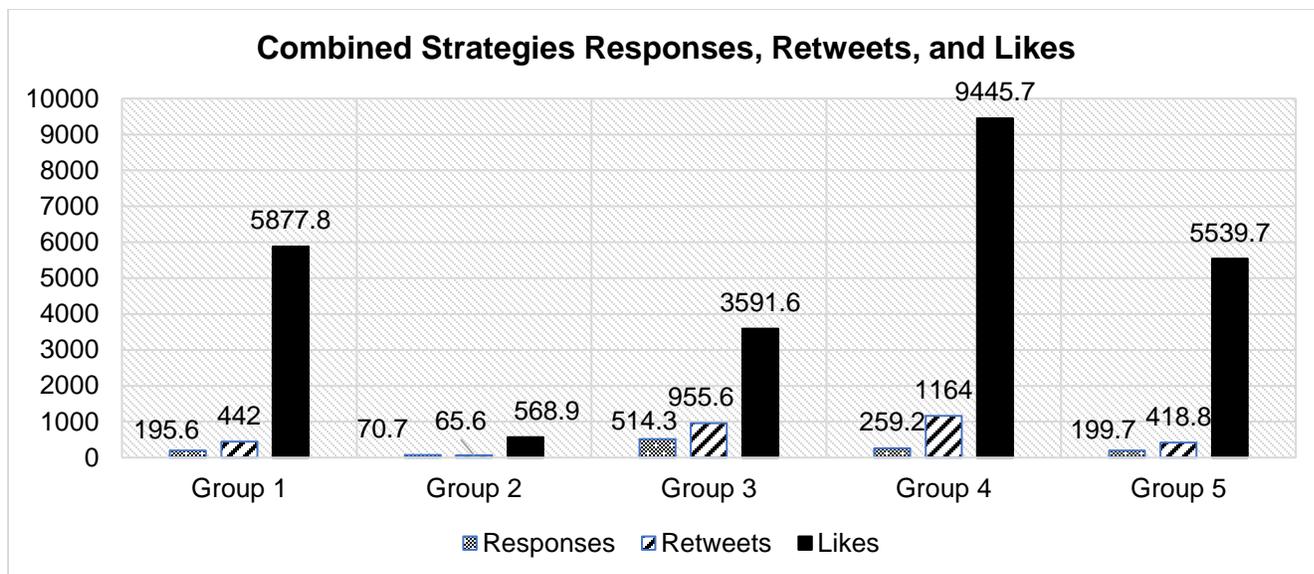
H4-2. The responses to tweets using overlapping strategies will be mostly positive.

Group 5, or the category with all traits, received the highest percentage in positive

responses at 67%, and was followed by group 4 (target/branding) (65.29%), group 1 (branding)

(58.35%), and group 3 (maintenance/branding) (56.12%). Maintenance, or group 2 appears to

receive the lowest positive reception at 37.30%, as well as the highest negative reception at

26.22%. Figure 13 demonstrates this below.

Figure 13

Positive, Negative, and Neutral responses for combined traits

Combined Strategies Responses
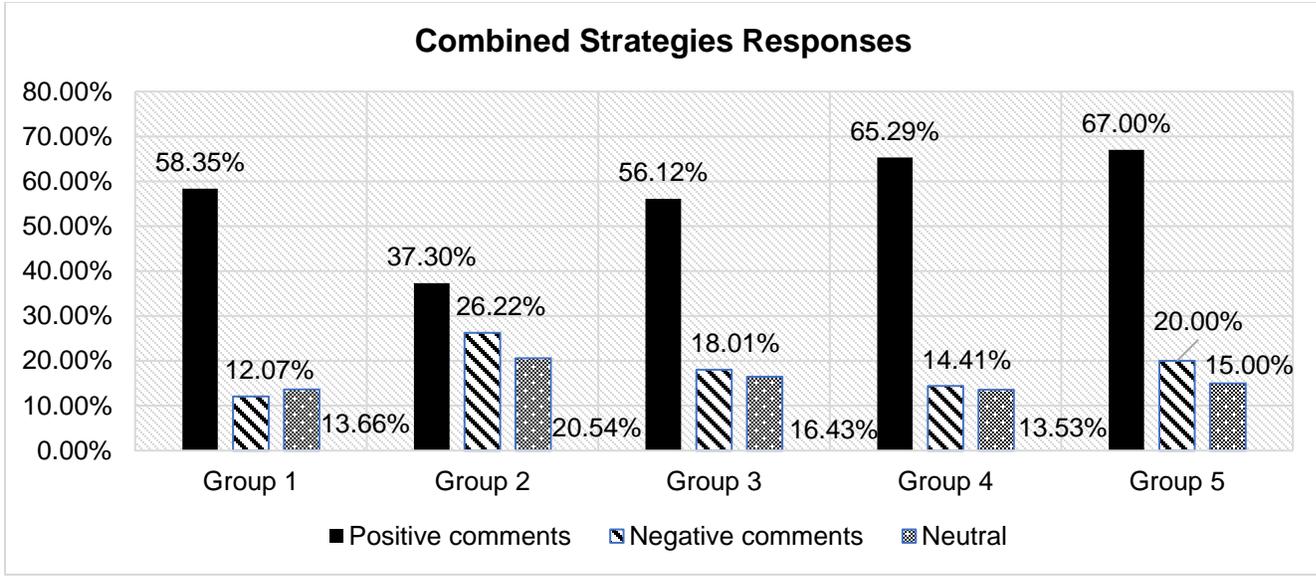
Total responses ($p = 0.63$), retweets, ($p = 0.62$), and likes, ($p = 0.09$) showed no significance, but both positive responses ($p < 0.001$), and negative responses ($p < 0.001$), exhibited extremely significance results. These results would imply that traits in either combinations do not have a significant effect on responses, retweets, and likes, but may have a significant effect on positive and negative responses. Therefore, as demonstrated in Table 12, these results do not support hypotheses H4-1, but do support H4-2.

Table 12

F-test results for combined stats

Variable	F	F-Crit	p-value
Responses	0.65	2.41	0.63
Retweets	0.66	2.41	0.62
Likes	2.02	2.41	0.092
Positive	5.58	2.41	0.0002
Negative	5.6	2.41	0.0002

Conclusion

Social media has changed the marketing landscape for brands. It has made interpersonal communication over social media an acceptable marketing technique for brands. Interpersonal relationship theories were referenced to understand what encourages relationship building and

compare them to brand interactions on Twitter. From there, methods to test which traits best produced the most positive responses, likes, and retweets from followers were determined. Various Twitter posts as well as comments from followers were examined. Ultimately, it was found that brand personality and targeting to be the most popular and effective strategies, suggesting that a brand which exhibits personality and knows their demographic see the best results on Twitter. Additionally, maintenance strategies such as calls to action and positivity may not have much of an affect or may be received negatively on Twitter.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that brand personality may receive significantly more likes as well as positive responses. These results are in line with both of the reports about social media (Jargon, 2017; Sprout Social, n.d.) and research from Hu (2019) and Etter (2019). Whether or not maintenance strategies can produce more likes, retweets, and responses remains mostly inconclusive. Total responses and retweets especially do not seem to be affected by any maintenance strategies. Additionally, posts which are strictly calls to action, drawing attention to CSR, or bolstering the brand's reputation seem to either not benefit brands at all or receive slightly more negative responses. These results would be counterintuitive to Tsimonis's (2020) research, which suggested advice, catering, entertainment, or calls to action would have a positive effect on customer reception. This also conflicts with Li's (2015) research, which suggested positivity and CSR would be seen as favorable. Therefore, it appears in the case of Twitter, followers are more receptive to personality than to maintenance strategies alone.

The results for targeting were not supportive of H3-1, but were supportive of H3-2. Targeting received slightly more positive responses. This could be seen as a reflection of Shukla's (2020) statement that memes can be perceived as fun and reflect consumer mindset.

Engagement, however, did not seem to be influenced. This did not reflect the results of Jimenez's (2020) research, an experiment executed on multiple social media platforms that suggested meme sharing would encourage more engagement.

Lastly, H4-1 was inconclusive, but H4-2 was supported. All strategies used together did receive more positive comments. Once more, it has been observed maintenance had the least number of positive responses in comparison to the other traits. Additionally, it was observed that targeting and brand personality were frequently seen in correlation of one another. This would be why when testing for H4-1 and H4-2 there was no category for targeting alone. This could be because brands must adapt their personality to their targeted demographic, and so their social media persona could also be a product of targeting strategies.

These results suggest that a brand personality and targeting strategies are essential to maintain adequate rapport with customers. Maintenance strategies appear to either not affect or sometimes deter positive reception of the brand on Twitter. None of the observed styles of personable tweets had any conclusive results for responses and retweets. This would indicate the amounts of comments and retweets would not be a beneficial way to determine reactions to posts. Likes, however, may be a more sufficient way to gauge follower's appreciation.

The interchangeable nature targeting and brand personality exhibits would explain why Wendy's has gained so much popularity with the sarcastic witty approach online. With the exception of KFC, each of the brands are exhibiting a quirky personality and posting memes on Twitter. This would also explain why KFC, which decided on a marketing strategy of maintenance over brand personality, fell short of likes, responses, and retweets, as well as received less positive reception.

In summary, audiences today do not seem to be accepting of an online presence that lacks personality and focuses on presenting the company in a positive light. Social media is for user expression, allowing the user to be in control over the messages they send and what is publicized about themselves online. Gatherings of individuals on group pages or forums begins to take on the likenesses of a community. This reflects Adler's framework, presented by Arnaboldi and Coget (2016). Social consciousness, calls to action, and bolstering of one's own achievements without personality or any relatability could be seen by audiences as a poor attempt to appeal to community. This can bring the brand a poor perception and be interpreted as a marketing environment on Twitter, which may dissuade some followers. Brands which appeal to a sense of community are more human-like in their interaction. Therefore, with humor and relatability, they are embraced by the social media community.

In short, brands should continue to "befriend" the customers, or learn to be personable to build attachments. What companies who choose to use online outlets should take away from this research is that social media is not an environment for hard sales, but an environment full of personality.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on messages in brand tweets and the reception that followed. This study does not take external factors into consideration, such as the brands' reputations that may have played into the results. In the instance of KFC, for example, many of the negative retweets that were observed were related to hygiene issues within the restaurants and negative reactions to items that were removed from the menus. Additionally, data from KFC had to be extracted from as far back as July due to infrequent posting. Time of the year could potentially factor into consumer attitudes. Additionally, the coding for the content analysis could have been expanded,

with the maintenance category further classified into more specific traits, for example. Lastly, there were also two coders present for data collection, one of which was the author. It would be suggested in the future, in order to avoid coder bias, to have more coders for data collection.

Future research should expand with both quantitative and qualitative data. Further assessment of the language use of negative and positive comments from followers would be useful. Additionally, a second suggestion would be to assess the brands' post frequency to assess how that can additionally effect consumer attitudes. Surveys could be implemented to those in the general population who follow at least 1 fast food company on Twitter. Interviews with social media managers of fast-food places would also be a suggestion to gather information of types of reactions they receive as well as how they are handled. It would also be encouraged to repeat this data collection at a different time of the year in order to assess if seasons or events could affect consumer attitudes at the time. Lastly, an assessment for another culture outside of the U.S. would be useful. It would be interesting to see if markets outside of the U.S. for either the same companies or local popular companies have the same reactions as American audiences.

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