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A Case Study of YouTuber's use of Twitter for Consumer Engagement

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Abstract: Twitter as a popular social media site has become a widely used platform for brands to establish consumer engagement (CE), a connection between firms and consumers beyond product consumption and purchase. CE is important for brands to build a long-standing relationship with consumers, leading to positive marketing outcomes. Meanwhile, famous YouTubers, who have obtained large fanbases also use Twitter to connect with their viewers beyond the YouTube platform, as a part of their self-branding process. Existing studies found various strategies brands use to engage consumers on Twitter. Studies on individual users and other celebrities also found that they implement similar factors as brands for engaging their followers, suggesting the application of CE from organisations to individual bases on Twitter. However, while it can be argued that as personal brands, YouTubers also implement similar CE strategies as traditional brands on Twitter to engage their viewers as their consumers, little research has explicitly explored the CE factors implemented by YouTubers on Twitter. Therefore, by adapting the concept of CE, this research explores "How do YouTubers use Twitter for consumer engagement?". The research implemented a qualitative case study on UK beauty vlogger Zoe Sugg (Zoella)'s Twitter account. In the study, a qualitative content analysis was performed on over 3000 tweets collected from Sugg's Twitter via API to identify strategies implemented by Sugg that can be seen as CE factors that are also used by brands. The results show that like other brands, Sugg uses various CE factors, including interaction, information offers, topical messages, rewards, and visual elements on Twitter to engage her viewers. The research proposes that CE strategies that are used by traditional brands are also implemented by YouTubers and similar online personalities for engaging audiences on Twitter. The research contributes to understanding the building of YouTube-viewer relationships from the perspective of achieving CE on social media sites beyond YouTube.

Keywords: Consumer Engagement, YouTubers, Twitter, Social Media

1. Introduction

Twitter is commonly used by brands for consumer engagement (CE), a connection between brands and consumers beyond product purchases and consumptions (Van Doorn et al., 2010). CE helps brands to build closer relationships with consumers (Sashi, 2012), leading to positive marketing outcomes including enhanced consumer trust and retainment (Obilo, Chefor, and Saleh, 2021). Existing studies have suggested various strategies brands use to engage consumers on Twitter including replying to consumers' tweets and the use of images and videos (e.g., Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu, 2021; Jansen et al., 2009).

Meanwhile, famous YouTubers, who have obtained large fan bases on YouTube also use Twitter to connect with their viewers. YouTubers were found to have ways to engage their audience within YouTube, such as interacting with viewers through video comments and sharing personal stories in videos (Zhang, 2022). However, using Twitter was found to be a part of their self-branding process (Tarnovskaya, 2017) beyond the YouTube platform.

Existing studies found that celebrities and other Twitter users implement factors that are similar to brands' CE strategies for engaging their followers on Twitter (e.g., Java et al., 2007; Marwick and Boyd, 2011), suggesting the application of CE on Twitter from organisation to individual bases. Since personal branding mirrors traditional branding (Arruda, 2003 in Chen, 2013), it is arguable that YouTubers also implement strategies like traditional brands' on Twitter for CE. However little research has explicitly explored YouTubers' CE factors on Twitter. Therefore, by adapting the concept of CE, this research explores "How do YouTubers use Twitter for consumer engagement?".

The research contributes to understanding the building of YouTube-viewer relationships on social media sites beyond YouTube from the perspective of CE, adding to the existing literature in social media and marketing.

2. Consumer Engagement Factors on Twitter

Researchers have suggested brands' strategies for CE on Twitter. For instance, Jansen et al (2009) suggest that brands can build CE by replying to consumers' tweets and providing useful information. Malhotra, Malhotra, and See (2013) indicate that brands can use topical messages (tweets about popular days and events), educational content, humanized content (messages with human tones), product deals, asking for retweets, and events notifications for CE on Twitter. Ashley and Tuten (2015) suggest brands promote product information and rewards for CE on Twitter. Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu (2021) found that images, videos, and informative and interactive content have a significant impact on CE on Twitter and Facebook.

Although the above studies explored CE strategies on Twitter, they did not apply them to YouTubers. On the other hand, Java et al. (2007) and Naaman, Boase, and La (2010) demonstrated several uses of Twitter by individual users to engage others, including interacting with other users, sharing information, and posting visual content like photos. Marwick and Boyd (2011) found strategies celebrities use to engage fans on Twitter, such as replying to tweets. Some of these are like what brands do for CE on Twitter (e.g., Ashely and Tuten, 2015; Malhotra, Malhotra and See, 2013). YouTubers are individual users who are found to use Twitter for personal branding (Tarnovskaya, 2017). So, it can be argued that YouTubers implement some similar CE strategies on Twitter as personal brands to attract their viewers as their consumers. However, limited research explored the CE factors implemented by YouTubers on Twitter.

Therefore, by adopting the concept of CE, this research explores "How do YouTubers use Twitter for consumer engagement?", by conducting a case study of the UK's famous beauty vlogger Zoe Sugg's main Twitter account.

3. Methods

Zoe Elizabeth Sugg (or Zoella as her YouTube name), is a UK beauty vlogger with over 11 million subscribers on her YouTube channels. Apart from YouTube, Sugg also uses other social media sites to connect with viewers, including Twitter. The research focuses on the year 2017 as an important period for Sugg when she reached over 11 million subscribers on YouTube and Twitter (Socialblade, 2022), demonstrating her success in engaging viewers and making the engagement factors to be found on her Twitter important. 3200 tweets posted in 2017 on Sugg's main Twitter account(@ZoeSugg)[1] were collected via Twitter API[2].

After collecting the tweets, the analysis consists of two steps. In the first step, the tweets were categorized into different types. Table 1 shows all types of tweets from Sugg after the categorisation. In the second step, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on the tweets in each category to identify factors that are similar to those used by brands for CE, based on existing literature on brands' CE strategies (e.g., Malhotra, Malhotra, and See 2013; Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu, 2021).

Table 1: Categories of Tweets Collected

Tweet Category	Description
External Links	Tweets with links that lead to the external content, such as links to Sugg's newly uploaded videos on YouTube.
Status update	Tweets that update Sugg's stories and news in her life.
Communication	Tweets in which Sugg either encourages users to communicate with her or reacts to other users' tweets relating to her.

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[1] To clarify, Sugg has changed her accounts in multiple occasions. When the research started in 2017, her main Twitter was named @Zoella, but was changed to @ZoeSugg later on. However, recently, @ZoeSugg was later removed with another @Zoella account added as her personal blog twitter account. The research results presented in this paper was based on the data collected from her main account, not the current @Zoella account searchable on Twitter.

[2] Twitter API: https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/api-reference-index

Tweet Category	Description
Presence maintenance	Tweets for keeping her visibility on Twitter. Such as greeting messages like "Good morning".
Promotion and announcement	Tweets contain advertising and forecast of some activities, including the videos she is about to upload on YouTube.
Photos and videos	Messages for sharing photos and videos.
Retweets	Retweeting messages from other Twitter accounts.

4. Results and Discussion

Five factors were identified in Sugg's Twitter posts that can be seen as CE strategies that are also used by traditional brands - interaction, information offers, topical messages, rewards, and visual elements (See Table 2 for a summary of the findings).

Interaction is not only useful for brands to establish CE on Twitter (Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu 2021; Malhotra, Malhotra, and See; 2013) but also a key for CE in general (Eslami, Ghasemaghaei and Hassanein 2022; Shawky et al., 2020; Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan, 2012). The results show that like traditional brands, Sugg interacts with her followers through tweets. These include asking viewers about new YouTube video ideas and replying to viewers' tweets.

Sugg also offers related information to their viewers. The primary form of the information offering is the promotion of videos to be or has been uploaded on her YouTube channels. It is similar to brands offering product information for CE (Ashely and Tuten, 2015), due to consumers' aim to seek information on social media (Kahn and Ahamd, 2021).

Topical messages refer to tweets about popular events, such as holidays and festivals. topical messages may make consumers feel more personally treated and affect CE (Malhotra, Malhotra and See, 2013). Similarly, Sugg posts different forms of topical messages including greetings on national days and Christmas wishes to her followers.

Rewards are a common strategy for achieving CE for brands, such as exclusive deals (Ashely and Tuten, 2015). Sugg also retweets messages from her beauty brand Zoella Beauty, which mainly contains deals and special offers such as gifts and discounts.

Finally, Sugg adds different visual elements in her tweets including photos, videos, and motion graphics (e.g., GIFs). According to researchers, visual elements can increase the richness and vividness of the tweets for brands' CE (Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu, 2021; Pletikosa Cvijikj, and Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014).

Table 2: CE Strategies in Sugg's Tweets

CE Strategies	Descriptions
Interaction	Tweets that ask viewers to perform specific actions (e.g., providing video ideas, asking questions) and replies to viewers' tweets.
Information offering	Tweets that provide information and updates that are relevant to Sugg's YouTube channels, such as new video uploads.
Topical messages	Tweets that greet viewers on holidays and public events, such as Christmas greetings.
Rewards	Retweets that contain special deals and offers, for example, from Sugg's beauty brand.
Visual elements	Tweets that contain any form of visual elements including videos, photos, and motion graphics.

Conclusion

This research aims to explore how YouTubers use Twitter for CE, via a case study of Zoe Sugg's Twitter account. The results show that Sugg uses interaction, information offers, topical messages, rewards, and visual elements on Twitter for CE beyond YouTube, which are similar to the strategies used by traditional brands for CE on Twitter. The outcome initially proposes that CE strategies that are used by traditional brands are also implemented by individual YouTubers or similar online personalities for engaging their audiences on Twitter. This applies the concept of CE to individual Twitter users and contributes to the understanding of the building of YouTube-viewer relationships beyond YouTube. Future research can study other YouTubers. Furthermore, more quantitative methods can be used in the future to investigate the efficiency of these strategies on CE including measuring metrics such as likes and shares of the tweets.

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