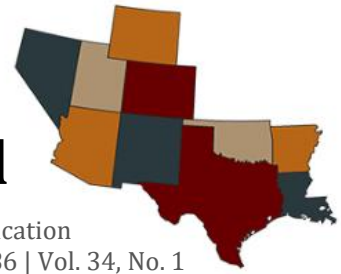


Southwestern Mass Communication Journal

A journal of the Southwest Education Council for Journalism & Mass Communication
ISSN 0891-9186 | Vol. 34, No. 1



Mobile Communication and Food Trucks in an Urban Environment: A Case Study

Jennifer T. Edwards and Sarah K. Maben
Tarleton State University

The purpose of this study is to discover the interactions between mobile food truck operators and their external/internal audiences via Twitter. Researchers examined the tweets (n=483) that emerged from patrons and owners of seven food trucks within a metropolitan food park within a one-month period. A content analysis of Twitter feeds for multiple trucks provided a glimpse into one social media channel and that communication among mobile food truck operators and their external groups (loyal customers and potential customers). Results indicate tweets fell into three categories of basic Twitter-based communication, truck presence, and marketing and public relations. Tweets created social presence by linking the digital food truck to the physical truck. Messages were one-way in nature, and geared more toward marketing and less toward engaging customers and creating a community.

Keywords: Food Trucks; Twitter; Social Media; Business Communication; Social Presence Theory; Mobile Communication

Social media have extended the food community to the digital world: status updates in Facebook about successful and failed dinner attempts, pinned recipes on Pinterest, YouTube instructional videos for beginning chefs, Flickr images of a farmer's market heirloom tomato incorporated in a new dish, blogs for every kind of foodie, and tweets about the arrival of a gourmet food truck. Social media helped connect foodies with mobile and transient dining options. Food trucks serve their dishes in a variety of locations ranging from parks and plazas to tourist hubs and events at college campuses (Wessell, 2012). Despite their location, these

alternatives to the traditional restraints to the restaurant environment, provide patrons with opportunities to experience their favorite food from almost any location or venue. The mobile food truck movement grew from the economic circumstances during late 2000s (Shouse, 2011).

Mobile food truck owners and patrons have adopted an informal way of communicating with one another through social media. Primarily communicating through Facebook and Twitter, food trucks use social media to choose locations on their daily route and to push this chosen location to followers or fans (Wessell, 2012). Mobile food truck owners have also received reviews from patrons who use social media rating sites such as UrbanSpoon and Yelp (Food Trucks, 2012).

Without social media, food trucks would be less able to mobilize the masses in many cities in America. Before the general publication relied on mobile food truck sightings in the community, they relied on traditional word-of-mouth promotion or the existence of the good truck at a stationary location. According to Sniderman (2011), social media has a large role in making the food trucks more accessible and enabling them to become a crucial part of the community. Through a single tweet, trucks can tout a temporary location to followers in a few seconds. Mobile food truck vendors also have the ability to extend their reach past the brick and mortar barriers of traditional food establishments (Tester, Yen, & Laraia, 2010). The purpose of this study is to discover the interactions between food truck operators and their external and internal audiences via Twitter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Savvy organizations are meeting their constituents where they are – in social media. About 70% of Americans are using social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2017). In addition, the smartphone has placed social media in the fingertips of its users, wherever they may be. The Pew Research Center reported that 56 percent of American adults own a smartphone; this is an increase in 10 percentage points since the prior year (Smith, 2013). For the current study, this means potential food truck patrons have the means to communicate with their favorite mobile gourmet truck and truck operators can engage with customers in social media from wherever they park for the mealtime rush. The background for this study draws from literature about social media, dialogic communication in digital spaces, and social presence theory.

Twitter, a micro-blogging platform, serves as a social network for its users to send blasts of messages to their followers' smartphones and computer screens (Young, 2008). This social network enables users to post short messages (character limit was 140 before 2017) to the website. Individuals and organizations use Twitter in a variety of contexts (Tobias, 2011) including advertising, personal, and mass communication. Users access the site for breaking news (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017), citizen journalism (e.g. Correa-Cabrera, Machuca, & Ragland, 2016), educational reasons (e.g. Carpenter & Krutka, 2014), advocacy for causes (e.g. Carew, 2014), professional networking and learning communities (e.g. Visser, Calvert Evering & Barrett, 2014) and brand and customer connections (e.g. Buzzeto-More, 2013).

Businesses use social media outlets like Twitter to “increase customer loyalty and retention, to increase sales and revenues, to improve customer satisfaction, to create brand awareness, and to build reputation” (He, Wang, Chen, & Zha, 2017, p. 149). About 30% of top brands have a dedicated Twitter feed for customer service (Coffee, 2013). Additionally, Zhang, Jansen, and Chowdhury (2011) found that businesses could influence electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on Twitter. Their path analysis

research showed a major boost in the eWOM volume immediately after brands launch their Twitter accounts.

Customer are using sites like Twitter to give feedback, seek product information, lodge complaints or publicly shame a company, give thanks and kudos, and secure up-to-date information and promotions. Buzzeto-More (2013) found that 73% of responding social media users fan or follow products or companies they like on social networking sites; 62% recommend companies and products to friends via social media.

These recommendations are especially helpful to a mobile food truck. New York City began to see the intersection of specialty food trucks and “popular internet marketing platform” Twitter in 2008 and 2009 (Caldwell, 2013, p. 306). An advantage to using Twitter is that street cuisine could become even more mobile moving to new potential customers during the day, tweeting out location changes. This broadened the client base. In her ethnographic study of NYC’s food truck culture, Caldwell (2011) found that the Twitter customers were only a small part of the truck’s revenue, but were an “integral part in shaping the allure and character of the truck on the street” (p. 308). She asserts that the Twitter feed **is** the truck, creating dialog with customers. The opportunity to create dialog does not always mean the conversation occurs.

Dialogic Communication in Digital Spaces

Social media take the gatekeepers out of the communication process making it an ideal forum for dialog, public participation, and engagement. Social media applications make it easy for consumers to quickly respond directly to an organization, with a text-based note or even a visual representation like an emoji. Common aspects in the literature about social media involve the importance of creating community, conversation and original content when operating in social networks (Brown, 2010). Used to its potential, social media can make communicating with target audiences more interactive, two-way and even socially responsible (Grunig, 2009). Of Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) outlined models for communicating with stakeholders, two-way symmetrical is most desirable because it seeks stakeholder feedback and creates dialog. Social networking platforms provide “opportunity for customers to engage with companies in order to become involved and potentially influence the organisation’s (sic) decisions and policies” (Connolly, Scott, & DeLone, 2016, p. 60).

The catch is that few organizations are actually using social media to the fullest for true engagement and dialog with stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Taylor et al., 2001). One-way sporadic communication techniques fall short in today’s age of social media, where everyone is a content-creator. For example, Zhang et al. (2011) showed business engagement online was the main factor for consumer engagement and the establishment of a brand community.

Two-way communication and engagement require listening to customers. Maben and Gearhart (2017) applied active and emphatic listening traits to social media to identify two-way communication and engagement between organizational social media accounts and their stakeholders. They wrote: “Companies must navigate between functions of using social media accounts to foster dialogue and understanding (empathy) or to provide customer service (activity)” (p. 10).

Social Presence Theory

When applied to social media research, social presence theory can be established and maintained when customers communicate with a business through computer-mediated channels and the customers

receive various cues for interpretation (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Social presence theory is the salience of one person in a mediated environment (Short et al., 1976). Building on the prior definition, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) add the following terms, "to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to other participants as 'real people'" (Short et al., 1976, p. 89). In computer-mediated communication (CMC) research, customers prefer CMC when it is similar to face-to-face communication (Ji Hee, Hollenbeck, & Zinkhan, 2008). When CMC is similar to face-to-face communication (the most socially present communication method), participants perceive the virtual communication experience as more friendly and communicative. In this study, the food truck and its operator would want communication exchanges with their patrons and potential patrons that created social presence.

Over 12 different methods to establish social presence in the virtual environment were discovered by Aragon (2003). Some of these methods include: posting introductions before beginning a conversation, providing frequent feedback, and incorporating video and audio in the virtual message. Social media channels, like Twitter, are being used to establish social presence (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009). Food truck operators, like many business owners, establish relationships with customers in virtual and physical spaces. Based on the literature, three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: In which ways do mobile food truck owners and workers communicate with patrons through Twitter?

RQ2: In which ways do patrons communicate with mobile food truck owners and workers through Twitter?

RQ3: In which ways do mobile food truck owners and workers communicate with each other through Twitter?

METHODS

A content analysis of Twitter feeds for multiple trucks within a metropolitan area mobile food truck park provides insight to the mobile food truck community. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in this mixed methods study. Researchers adopted a grounded theory-based content analysis to discover how food trucks are utilizing social media to communicate with their customers. Qualitative content analysis has been utilized for text analysis of historical documents and in mass communication research (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003). Grounded theory-based content analysis requires the careful study of the artifacts in the research (i.e. - tweets) and then coding the social media posts into categories. Then researchers are required participate in the axial coding process, by examining each of the pieces of the content and extracting categories as each emerges from the content (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003). After persisting through the axial coding process, the researchers refine, combine, and differentiate the emerging categories. A qualitative research method was employed because it enables the researchers to relate, position, and understand the abstract inferred content from higher level processing of the text and interactions were not directly revealed by counting or categorizing of the content (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003). In this study, tweets emerging from patrons and owners of food trucks within the metropolitan food park within a one-month period were examined. The unit of analysis was the individual tweet.

Table 1
Trucks by the Tweets

	No. of Followers	No. Truck Follows	Tweet Grade	No. of Tweets Analyzed
Food Truck 1	50	26	51	24
Food Truck 2	163	110	74	121
Food Truck 3	1,347	379	96.5	129
Food Truck 4	1,204	92	96.5	50
Food Truck 5	1,960	2,153	95.9	70
Food Truck 6	124	41	95.1	32
Food Truck 7	487	234	69	57
TOTAL	5,335	3,035	Mean=82.6	483

Note. Tweet.Grader.com used to figure Tweet Grade. Twitter.com used for No. of Followers and No. the Truck Follows.

Participants and Contexts

In this study, seven frequent mobile food truck in the selected mobile food truck park located in a metropolitan area were included. Trucks are not relegated to this park and include the following:

- Mobile Food Truck 1—This food truck features Spanish-style dishes.
- Mobile Food Truck 2—With a diverse food selection ranging from Texas-style Mediterranean nachos (Tex-Med) to waffles, this food truck is focused on the college crowd and residence halls.
- Mobile Food Truck 3—A dessert-only truck with eclectic cupcakes.
- Mobile Food Truck 4—Focused on traditional, yet non-traditional American cuisine, this food truck has sandwiches and soups.
- Mobile Food Truck 5—Centered on everything bacon.
- Mobile Food Truck 6—A healthy option with dishes ranging from salmon rolls to cucumber salads.
- Mobile Food Truck 7—This food truck is for Italian food lovers.

Data Collection and Analysis

Tweets were copied from the Twitter feed available on twitter.com from each mobile food truck. Then these tweets were added to a working spreadsheet for coding. One month's worth of tweets was used and coding categories were created based on a cursory review of the tweets, along with the authors' expectations about the kinds of messages that would transpire. A total of 483 tweets were coded for the seven trucks. A few coding categories were included at the beginning to determine whether the message

was aimed at communicating with followers or other food trucks, from where the tweet began (the truck or a fan), references to location, time, events and weather, re-tweets, photo attachments, and menu items.

Table 2
General Twitter-Based Communication

	Comm. with Followers	Comm. with Food Trucks	Fan Message	RT	Photo
Food Truck 1	18	0	0	0	0
Food Truck 2	112	6	11	13	25
Food Truck 3	117	1	0	0	3
Food Truck 4	40	18	11	10	33
Food Truck 5	63	4	0	0	2
Food Truck 6	29	13	3	5	9
Food Truck 7	23	22	8	43	24
TOTALS	402	64	33	71	96

As new categories emerged, they were added to the coding document and tweets were recoded to account for the additional categories. Descriptive adjectives and mentions of entertainment are examples of such additions. The categories evolved and were interpreted as such:

- Communication with followers— accounted for any communication geared toward followers; a message could be deemed for both the followers and other truck operators
- Communication with trucks— accounted for when trucks mentioned one another by name or @name
- Fan message—when fans tweeted to the trucks
- Retweet (RT)—when message was retweeted by the truck
- Photo—when the message included a link for a Twitter pic or an Instagram photo
- Invitations— “come,” “stop by,” and “join” and language that directly invited followers to attend
- Location—when trucks mentioned their location or future location
- Meal time and time of day—when trucks mentioned “lunch” or “dinner” or time frames when they would be accessible; the categories were coded separately, but are reported as one in this paper
- Weather—mentions of the day being a “beautiful” one for a meal at the park, or references to temperature
- Customer service—originally intended for customer complaints, mentions of closings or answers to specific requests fit in this category
- Food item—accounted for mentions of menu items served at the truck

- Events—when a truck mentioned a special event or tie-in to an existing event
- Descriptive adjectives - for mentions of “yummy,” “delicious,” “scrumptious,” and other adjectives associated with good (or bad) food

Two primary coders reviewed the trucks’ tweets and the coders checked 50 percent of the tweets for the other coder. Categories with some discrepancies were reviewed and discussed. A better definition of the category was developed and individual cases were re-examined.

RESULTS

Each of the seven food trucks contributed tweets forming the following overarching categories: general Twitter-based communication, truck presence, and marketing and public relations. Communication with followers, communication with food trucks, fan messages, re-tweets (RTs), and photos, counted as general Twitter-base communication. This provides an overall look at how trucks and patrons exchange messaging.

	Invitations	Location	Meal Time & Time of Day	Weather
Food Truck 1	18	20	17	2
Food Truck 2	34	41	73	3
Food Truck 3	16	53	38	14
Food Truck 4	11	38	48	5
Food Truck 5	2	8	7	0
Food Truck 6	7	21	17	4
Food Truck 7	15	21	13	3
TOTALS	103	202	213	31

The most responses were “communication with followers,” which had 402 tweets. An example of a tweet in this category was, “November is National Pepper Month. Our favorite way to celebrate is having our Skinny Veggie Pita with some <http://instagr.am...>” The photo subcategory had the second highest number of tweets (96 tweets). An example of one of the tweets emerging in this category was, “Not sure who's photo bombing who. @[Name of Food Truck] #foodtruck #photobomb @ [Name of Mobile Food Truck Park] Food Park <http://instagr.am...>”. The third highest subcategory was “re-tweets”, which had 71 tweets. One of the tweets emerging in this category was, “Lunch time? @[Name of Food Truck] @[Name of Food Truck] and @[Name of Food Truck] are all out here cooking up amazing food 'til 2pm. Come and get it!,” which was posted by a mobile food truck location. The fourth highest

number of responses was the “communication with food trucks” category, which had 64 tweets. An example of one of the tweets emerging in this category was, “THANK YOU to everyone who came out yesterday for our car show @[Name of Food Truck] @[Name of Food Truck] @[Name of Food Truck] GREAT FOOD and all for a good cause;).” The subcategory containing the least number of responses was the “fan message” category, which had only 33 tweets. An example of one of these tweets was, “@[Name of Food Truck] is the bomb. That's the coolest thing I could think to say. #like pic.twitter.com”.

Table 4
Marketing & Public Relations

	Customer Service	Food Item	Events	Descriptive adjectives
Food Truck 1	1	10	5	0
Food Truck 2	6	54	18	1
Food Truck 3	12	32	13	4
Food Truck 4	2	6	1	3
Food Truck 5	2	4	0	0
Food Truck 6	0	7	2	0
Food Truck 7	0	10	13	0
TOTAL	23	123	52	8

Truck Presence

In the truck presence overarching category, four subcategories emerged (Table 3): invitations, location, and time of day, and weather.

The subcategory containing the most responses was the “mealtime and time of day” category, which had 213 tweets. This is due in part to the summation of mentions with a mealtime and mentions with a time of day. An example of a tweet emerging in this category was, “Happy #Saturday! Come on out & enjoy this gorgeous weather with us. We will be #open ALL DAY, 11am-10:30pm, at #[Name]FoodPark. See you there!”. The “location” subcategory had the second highest number of tweets (202 tweets). The third highest subcategory was “invitation,” which had 103 tweets. One of the tweets emerging in this category was, “Tonight we are at a Spanish film festival at the Texas theatre in oak cliff. Come by and check us out.” The subcategory containing the fourth highest number of responses was the “weather” category, which had 31 tweets. An example of one of the tweets emerging in this category was, “could someone please tell the Sun to tone it down a bit today....Thhhhaaaank.”

Marketing and Public Relations

In the truck presence overarching category, four subcategories emerged (Table 3): customer service, food item, events, and descriptive adjectives. The subcategory containing the most responses

was the “food item” category, which had 123 tweets. An example of a tweet emerging in this category was, “Tonight we are serving delicious tapas @ the Sigels on Greenville. Come by and see us.” The events subcategory had the second highest number of tweets (52). An example of one of the tweets in this category was, “Join @[Name of Food Truck] Pizza Truck and us at Local Fest off of <address> today from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM”. The third highest subcategory was “customer service,” which had 23 tweets. One of the tweets emerging in this category was, “@XXXXXXX We'll let them know to have the spicy mayo!”. The subcategory containing the least number of responses was the “descriptive adjectives” category, which had only eight tweets. An example of one of these tweets was, “Today's Special is Peanut Butter & Jelly!! It is our vanilla bean cake filled with yummy homemade strawberry.”

Observations about Mobile Food Truck Posts

Each truck seemed to have an approach to its Twitter usage. Operators were not asked about their posting beliefs or policies, but some characteristics emerged among the mobile food trucks which enabled the researchers to postulate the potential guiding mechanisms. Truck 1 largely used its messages to broadcast locations and times of the truck’s location, with a few mentions of its tapas. It relied on a “come by and see us” catchphrase on many of its tweets. Truck 2 tied into local events and football fan fever for its message development. The truck used a pet name for its followers and frequented a college campus. It was the only truck to mention menu pricing on its tweets. Truck 3 posted to Facebook first and had the feed populate on Twitter, so many of the posts were longer than the 140 characters Twitter allowed at the time. The truck used photography to lure customers to its cupcakes. The truck also called on its followers to vote in a competition the truck wished to win. Truck 4 used hashtags more than the other trucks, but again, largely blasted out time, date and location of the truck. Its messages were formulaic and repetitive. Truck 5 had a unique situation because the truck operator decided to sell the truck, brand and recipes during the month captured. The operators started a new mobile food truck venture and sought support for the new brand while trying to sell the former brand. This truck was a grateful truck, with many “thank you” message to its followers and acknowledgments. Truck 6 used the @[Mobile Truck Name] for its mobile food truck park competitors, but also fell into the “when and where” formula. Truck 7 was a re-tweeting machine, with 75 percent of its messages as RTs.

DISCUSSION

Most communication displayed was one-way model of communication where the mobile food trucks pushed information to followers. While some interaction occurred with the foodies, it was not a two-way symmetrical model. The categories that emerged were Twitter-related communication elements, the truck’s presence and social media as the marketing and public relations extension of the truck.

In which ways do mobile food truck owners and workers communicate with patrons through social media technologies? To answer RQ1, the mobile food truck owners in this study used Twitter to communicate about their trucks’ locations and schedules, or the mobile food truck’s presence. Some mobile food trucks re-tweet patrons’ messages and photos, but little was done to encourage two-way communication through social media, which is consistent with other research (Lee, Gil de Zúñiga, Coleman, & Johnson, 2014; Linvill et al., 2012; Sauers & Richardson 2015; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Very few conversation starters or questions posed to the followers elicited responses from viewers of the tweets, consistent with Maben, Hodges, & Goen, in press. About 15% of the messages

were retweets (71 messages); in some studies (e.g. Linvill et al., 2012), the RT has been considered a form of interaction with customers, albeit one with fairly low engagement.

The mobile food trucks would invite patrons to visit them at the truck, or face-to-face for the purpose of a sale. Some operators would mention staff members by name in tweets, which could be a device that would help build a community and a feeling of closeness, and creating social presence. The operators would switch back and forth between using times of day in their tweets versus mentions of mealtimes. Some of the mobile food trucks would invite patrons to “share a meal.” This simple phrase represents a communal invitation, instead of the typical tweet from businesses asking patrons to “stop by between 11 and 2.”

For RQ2, patrons communicate with mobile food truck owners and workers through social media technologies, but not at the rate the trucks pushed out marketing messages. In this sample, only 33 messages (about 7%) were coded as fan messages. It could be that fans were connecting with trucks’ other social networking sites like Facebook or Instagram. Some patrons shared photography or love of a particular dish. A truck devoted to bacon received more love than the other trucks. These positive messages would then be retweeted for the benefit of the truck operators, so other followers could see. No negative messages were found in this sample, but it could be that the operators removed them from the Twitter feed. Some business sectors seem to connect more with patrons, and the communal nature of sharing food experiences at a food truck park did not move from the physical space to the virtual space in the volume we thought it might.

RQ3 asked about ways food truck owners communicate with each other, and some cross promotion was found in the sample. Sixty-four tweets (13%) represented truck to truck communication or mentions. The mobile food trucks would tag each other in tweets, which places the tweet on multiple feeds. This broadens the one truck’s base. A community element emerged from some trucks, but not all. The concept that a cluster of trucks will benefit all in the cluster was at work for some operators. Direct mentions of competition were not found in the sample. This communication outpaced fan-to-truck communication. Truck operators likely build relationships as they sell in the metro area and park near each other on a frequent basis. The online connection may be an extension of the face-to-face interactions over time.

Food trucks provide an interesting case study because they are moving targets, and a mobile communication technology is needed for up-to-the-minute information and marketing. A tool like Twitter allows operators to blast information to followers in a mass communication style. A slower communication tool or one that required more infrastructure or development time (like a printed brochure) does not keep up with the fluidity and spontaneity of the food truck culture. For example, a menu can change in the morning because of a great deal on a fresh catch or farmer’s market find. Truck presence as a finding makes sense because the point-of-sale happens at the physical location. Mentioning the physical space in a tweet also bridges from the virtual presence creating a more tangible social presence. Likely a sales tactic, the use of photos also suggests social presence. While the pictures were not examined in this particular study, 96 of the messages (about 20%) showcased photography. Similarly, food items were mentioned most in the tweets (123 messages; 25%) coded as marketing and public relations. Truck operators focused on the individual products they were offering. Only 8 messages used adjectives to describe the food. This may have been due to character limitations on Twitter, but leaves an area for operators to consider. Overall the category of marketing and public

relations was to be expected. Twitter is a fast and mobile-friendly way for a mobile food truck to directly communicate with customers without a gatekeeper, infrastructure and large sums of money. Implications for current food truck owners include the need for even cursory and periodic analysis of their social media messaging. Food truck operators could evaluate tweets focused on their mobile food truck for more than just number of followers and re-tweets. From such an analysis, operators could find opportunities for future engagement. Examining the quality of the interaction could help them build loyal fans like other brands are doing. Seeking two-way symmetrical communication, even sporadically, could lengthen their relationships and outlast what could be a current food fad.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Limitations for the study include the short-time frame of tweets. Reviewing one month of one communication channel for a business or community is a small reflection of its communication tactics. The timing of the tweets might also have an effect on results, given the seasonal nature of food trucks and outdoor dining. Truncated tweets might have had more themes to expose, but we decided to limit analysis with characters that were visible. For trucks that use Facebook to also distribute Twitter messages, some of the message was not revealed because Facebook permits a lengthier message. One food truck park in one metro also limits the generalizability of the study. One social media outlet is a small window into the communication occurring within groups. Facebook interactions, Instagram or Pinterest might add another dimension of discovery.

Analyzing the communication from hosting locations like mobile food truck parks, which would represent the whole lot of trucks, could help isolate possible community versus competition interactions. The park wants all of its trucks to succeed to the betterment of all of the trucks. How long the truck has been established in an area is a factor that needs to be considered in studying communication that is geared to building a community, or fan base.

An examination of social media policies (written or transmitted informally) mobile food truck operators and employees use when posting could shed some light on the one-way communication model this study revealed. Interviews with operators and employees would add another dimension of study, like their social media goals and motivations.

In conclusion, this study provided a look at food trucks' Twitter communication with customers. Like other organizations, more Twitter messages were devoted to promoting the business and its products than actively seeking fuller engagement with customers. The trucks represent one business model intertwined with technology, making a case study valuable to other industries. Piatti-Farnell (2011) indicated that most written publications focused on food primarily include information on the trivial and mundane. This study would add that Twitter communication for these trucks was in line with other studies and the truck-centric marketing mindset leaves room for improved customer engagement.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, T., & Kanuka, H. (2003). *E-research: Methods, strategies, and issues*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Aragon, S. (2003). Creating social presence in online environments. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 100, 57–68. Retrieved from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/86011352/home?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>
- Brown, L. D. (2010). Web 2.0 tools for customer communication. *TR News*, 271, 18-25.

- Buzzeto-More, N. A. (2013). Social media and prosumerism. *Issues in Informing Science & Information Technology*, 10, 1067-1080. Retrieved from <http://iisit.org/Vol10/IISITv10p067-080Buzzetto0040.pdf>
- Caldwell, A. (2013). Will tweet for food: Microblogging mobile food trucks—online, offline and in line. In P. Williams-Forsen & C. Counihan (Eds.) *Taking food public: Redefining foodways in a changing world*. New York: Routledge.
- Carew, J. (2014). Online environmental activism in South Africa: A case study of the #IAM4RHINOS Twitter campaign. *Global Media Journal, African Edition*, 8(2), 207-230. Retrieved from http://reference.sabinet.co.za/webx/access/electronic_journals/glomed_africa/glomed_africa_v8_n2_a3.pdf.
- Carpenter, J. P., & Krutka, D. G. (2014). How and why educators use Twitter: A survey of the field. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 46(4), 414-434. doi: 10.1080/15391523.2014.925701
- Coffee, P. (2013, March 7). 10 brands that do customer service right on Twitter. AdWeek, PRNewser [blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.adweek.com/prnewser/10-brands-that-do-customer-service-right-on-twitter/60393>
- Connolly, R., Scott, M., & DeLone, W. (2016). Corporate social media: Understanding the impact of service quality & social value on customer behavior. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 5(2), 44-74. Retrieved from <http://thejsms.org/index.php/TSMRI/article/view/131/78>
- Correa-Cabrera, G., Machuca, M., & Ragland, R. (2016). Citizen journalism: From Thomas in Boston to Twitter in Tamaulipas, a case study. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 5(3), 283-315. Retrieved from <http://thejsms.org/index.php/TSMRI/article/view/196>
- Dunlap, J. C., & Lowenthal, P. R. (2009). Tweeting the night away: Using Twitter to enhance social presence. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 20(2), 129–136. Retrieved from <http://www.jise.appstate.edu/Issues/13/295.pdf>
- Food Trucks. (2012). In R. Kendall Miller & K. D. Washington's (Eds.) *Restaurant, Food & Beverage Market Research Handbook*, (pp. 115-117).
- Garrison, B. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105. Retrieved from www.elsevier.com/locate/iheduc/
- Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalization. *PRism* 6(2). Retrieved from <http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/globalPR/GRUNIG.pdf>
- Grunig, J., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- He, W., Wang, F., Chen, Y., & Zha, S. (2017). An exploratory investigation of social media adoption by small businesses. *Information Technology & Management*, 18(2), 149-160. doi:10.1007/s10799-015-0243-3
- Ji Hee, S., Hollenbeck, C., & Zinkhan, G. (2008). The value of human warmth: Social presence cues and computer-mediated communications. *Advances in Consumer Research - North American Conference Proceedings*, 35, 793-794. Retrieved from <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/>
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28, 21–37. doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00108-X
- Lee, A., Gil de Zúñiga, H., Coleman, R., & Johnson, T. J. (2014). The dialogic potential of social media: Assessing the ethical reasoning of companies' public relations on Facebook and Twitter. In M.W. DiStaso, M.W. & D.S. Bortree (Eds.), *Ethical practice of social media in public relations* (pp. 157- 175). New York: Routledge.
- Linville, D. L., McGee, S. E., & Hicks, L. K. (2012). Colleges' and universities' use of Twitter: A content analysis. *Public Relations Review*, 38(4), 636–638. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.05.010
- Maben, S. K., & Gearhart, C. C. (2017). Organizational social media accounts: Moving toward listening competency. *International Journal of Listening*, Published online 14 Jun 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10904018.2017.1330658?needAccess=true>. DOI:10.1080/10904018.2017.1330658
- Maben, S. K., Hodges, B. H., & Goen, K. A. (in press). Community building tweets: How 'Effective Schools' use Twitter for stakeholder communication. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 37(4).
- Pew Research Center. (2017, January 12). Social media fact sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>
- Piatti-Farnell, L. (2011). *Food and Culture in Contemporary American Fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Rybalko, S., & Seltzer, T. (2010). Dialogic communication in 140 characters or less: How Fortune 500 companies engage stakeholders using Twitter. *Public Relations Review*, 36(4), 336–341. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.08.004

- Sauers, N. J., & Richardson, J. W. (2015). Leading by following: An analysis of how K-12 school leaders use Twitter. *NASSP Bulletin*, 99(2), 127-146.
- Shearer, E., & Gottfried, J. (2017, September 7). News use across social media platforms 2017. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/>
- Short, J. A., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Shouse, H. (2011). *Food Trucks: Dispatches and Recipes from the Best Kitchens on Wheels*. New York: Ten Speed Press.
- Smith, A. (2013, June 5). 56% of American adults are now smartphone owners. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/05/smartphone-ownership-2013/>
- Sniderman, Z. (2011, June 16). How social media is fueling the food truck phenomenon. *Mashable [blog]*. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2011/06/16/food-trucks-social-media/>
- Taylor, M., Kent, M. L., & White, W. J. (2001). How activist organizations are using the Internet to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 27(3), 263–284. doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(01)00086-8
- Tester, J. M., Yen, I. H., & Laraia, B. (2010). Mobile food vending and the after-school food environment. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 38(1), 70-73. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2009.09.030
- Tobias, E. (2011). Using Twitter and other social media platforms to provide situational awareness during an incident. *Journal of Business Continuity & Emergency Planning*, 5(3), 208-223.
- Visser, R. D., Calvert Evering, L., & Barrett, D. E. (2014). #TwitterforTeachers: The implications of Twitter as a self-directed professional development tool for K–12 teachers. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 46(4), 396-413.
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 102-106. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006
- Wessel, G. (2012). From place to nonplace: A case study of social media and contemporary food trucks. *Journal of Urban Design*, 17(4), 511-531. doi:10.1080/13574809.2012.706362
- Young, J. (2008, February 29). Forget e-mail: New messaging service has students and professors atwitter. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(25), Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Forget-E-Mail-New-Messaging/17813>
- Zhang, M., Jansen, B. J., & Chowdhury, A. (2011). Business engagement on Twitter: A path analysis. *Electronic Markets*, 21(3), 161-175.

Funding and Acknowledgements

This research study was sponsored by the Texas Social Media Research Institute (@TSMRI). The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Jennifer Edwards (Ed.D., Sam Houston State University) is the executive director of the Texas Social Media Research Institute. She is a professor of communication studies at Tarleton State University. Edwards has more than 50 presentations and publications to her name. @drjtedwards

Sarah Maben (Ph.D., University of North Texas) teaches journalism and public relations courses at Tarleton State University's Department of Communication Studies. She is the founding editor for the *Journal of Social Media in Society*. Her research focus is social media, experiential learning, and public relations. @sarahmaben