

Twitter as social network or news media critical thinking examples

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The Real-World Impact of Scientific Analysis of Twitter

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First presented at the Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on World Wide Web in 2010, Kwak, Lee, Park, and Moon's article, "What is Twitter, a Social Network or a News Media?" describes the researchers' unique methods of analysis to discover who uses Twitter and for what purpose. Utilizing a variety of highly technical evaluations following an evaluation of Twitter based on studying number of Twitter followers, ranking via PageRank and retweets, a trending topic analysis, and retweet information diffusion, the authors conclude that Twitter is much more of a news media or informational network than it is a social network. This article presents a valuable analytic survey that not only answers the question of whether Twitter is a social media or news media network, but also offers insight into how Twitter can be useful for businesses, public figures, social movements, or individual people.

The in-depth descriptions including written paragraphs, graphs, charts, and mathematical formulas used to evaluate Twitter are both a strong point and a weak point of the article. The authors' explanation of how they were able to get results, such as "we have crawled the entire Twitter site" (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon 2010, p. 591) is first followed by text explanations of terminology and a description of their information analysis categories and methods. The facts relayed within the abstract would be reasonably simple for a person with a general knowledge about Twitter to understand. Even the section regarding the author's data collection methods, though somewhat technical, at least makes it clear that user profiles, trending topics, and

tweets provided the primary data for research analysis. However, many of the graphs and mathematical formulas presented, even including the “Basic Analysis” graph, are difficult if not impossible to understand for those without higher education in statistics or mathematics. The article uses the formula to compare rankings of number of followers, PageRank, and number of retweets (Kwak et al. 2010, p. 595). This type of information is more useful for people who would like to design future research studies concerning Twitter than it is for those who want to read the article in order to understand why Twitter is either a social media network or news media. In spite of the technical nature of much of the article, throughout the piece the authors make statements and give easy to understand examples that support their idea that Twitter is more of a news and information outlet than it is a social network. Kwak et al. write, “Moreover, 67.6% of users are not followed by any of their followings in Twitter. We conjecture that for these users Twitter is rather a source of information than a social networking site” (2010, p. 593). The authors also describe a specific kind of news Twitter users look for and propagate. At the time of the article’s publication, the authors state that when it came to headline news on CNN which equate to trending topics on Twitter, over half of the time CNN reported news before the same information broke on Twitter (Kwak et al. 2010, p. 596). However, a different type of news broke first on Twitter than on CNN, for example sports team score results and accident reports; according to the Kwak et al., this makes Twitter-as-news’s model “close to omnipresent CCTV for collective intelligence” (2010, p. 596). In a society that appears to fear the idea of a Big Brother watching what everyone says and does, the previous quote

offers the chilling idea that people are creating Big Brother themselves. Nevertheless, the examples offered by Kwak et al.'s article appear to prove that Twitter is indeed a news media network and not a social network. The article offers valuable information for many types of researchers, from sociologists and computer scientists to physicists and linguists; it also offers an interesting statistical picture of Twitter and how it is used to more general students seeking to understand Twitter as a medium, such as how it works and why. Although some of the information is too technical for general readers, it provides a good source for any examination on Twitter's rise as a media phenomenon in the past decade.

References

Kwak, Haewoon, Lee, Changhyun, Park, Hosung, & Moon, Sue (2010). What is Twitter, a Social Network or a News Media? Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on World Wide Web, 591-600. doi: 10.1145/1772690.1772751