

# Tweeting, more than just self expression: study

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(PhysOrg.com) -- From CNN to Ashton Kutcher everyone is tweeting. In ads, many companies now display the logo of an animated blue bird holding a sign that says "follow me."

Twitter, a micro-communication service that gives users an opportunity to express their thoughts in 140-character "[tweets](#)," is a hit in the social media world. Companies are also benefiting from [Twitter](#) where 20 percent of the tweets contain requests for product information or responses to the requests, according to Jim Jansen, associate professor of information science and technology, College of Information Science and Technology, Penn State.

"People are using tweets to express their reaction, both positive and negative, as they engage with these products and services," said Jansen. "Tweets are about as close as one can get to the customer point of purchase for products and services."

Jansen, along with IST doctoral student Mimi Zhang, undergraduate student Kate Sobel and Twitter chief scientist Abdur Chowdhury, investigated micro-communicating as an electronic word-of-mouth medium, using Twitter as the platform. Their results were published in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Sciences and Technology*.

The researchers examined half a million tweets during the study. The team looked for tweets mentioning a brand and why the brand was

mentioned -- to inform others, express a view on the brand or something else -- and found that people were using tweets to connect with the products.

There is a trend when it comes to micro-communication and what it is used for, according to Jansen.

"Businesses use micro-communication for brand awareness, brand knowledge and customer relationship," he said. "Personal use is all over the board."

With about six million active users daily and predictions of more than 20 million users by the end of the year, Twitter has become the next big thing on the Web. Even though Twitter is still in its early stages of adoption, he sees it being around for a while. This is mainly because people and businesses are starting to make profits from it, using it as a creative way to market their products. He also said the concept of micro blogging as a whole can be just as influential as other social media channels.

"It may be right up there with e-mail in terms of its communication impact," Jansen said.

Results from the study found that users employ Twitter to inquire about product information. About 20 percent of the tweets contained product information in the form of asking and providing, thus giving companies a "rich source" of information concerning issues and questions that customers have regarding its products.

Jansen's prediction was not far off from the results, though some results did surprise him.

"A lot of the brand comments were positive," he said. "There are some good products out there, or at least products that people are happy with."

This research is among the first academic studies in the area of micro-communication within the business sector. Jansen will use the research as a backbone to build on. The research team is now conducting a focused study specifically on how companies manage and use their Twitter accounts.

"I've been really into the keyword advertising area and Web searching," said Jansen. "One aspect of micro-communication is the use of and sharing of information. This opens up a new area that has not been explored before."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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