

# Twitter pattern: Those who don't know you well are more likely to retweet

December 12 2013, by Debbie Freeman

---



Zhan Michael Shi, assistant professor in the W. P. Carey School of Business, says that if someone doesn't know you well, he or she is actually more likely to retweet something significant you say. Credit: Andy DeLisle/Arizona State University

(Phys.org) —Big news can spread like wildfire via Twitter, but did you ever think about why certain people choose to retweet? A new study from the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University shows that if someone doesn't know you well, he or she is actually more likely to retweet something significant you say.

"We found that people with weak ties, such as those who only have a one-way relationship on Twitter – who don't both follow each other – are more likely to retweet," says Zhan Michael Shi, assistant professor in the

W. P. Carey School of Business, one of the paper's authors. "We believe the retweeters are sharing the information because they think it will boost their reputation and influence by providing something new. People with stronger ties might not retweet because they believe their followers already know the details, and/or they may have communicated with each other in other ways."

The new research by Shi and his co-authors, professor Huaxia Rui of the University of Rochester and professor Andrew Whinston of the University of Texas at Austin, will be published in the academic journal *MIS Quarterly* in March. For their study, they put together a complex program utilizing 20 computers over 140 days. They were able to follow the progress of certain tweets for five-day periods and see whether the Twitter relationships between the author and retweeters were strong or weak. It's believed to be the first information-systems study using publicly available Twitter data to explore how people voluntarily relay information.

For example, the paper mentions a famed tweet in 2011, when a highly placed official in Washington said, "So I'm told by a reputable person they have killed Osama bin Laden." That tweet was sent out more than an hour before the White House officially announced the event. By the time the presidential announcement was made, tens of thousands of Twitter users had already spread the word, even though most of them didn't know anyone directly involved.

"Twitter is incredibly popular and fast-growing as a social medium, with more than 500 million registered users worldwide by April 2012," Shi says. "It's a combination of a broadcasting service and a social network, so our results aren't necessarily translatable to more pure social networks, such as Facebook. However, we think the new information is going to be very useful to people like social-media managers and marketers trying to understand how information is spread via social-

broadcasting networks like Twitter."

Among the results: Those with a two-way Twitter relationship are only 6 percent likely to retweet a remark like the ones of the median quality these researchers studied. However, one-way followers are 9.1 percent likely to tweet it. That's a boost of more than 50 percent.

The full study can be found online [here](#). More analysis is also available from knowWPCarey, the W. P. Carey School's online resource and newsletter, at [knowwpcarey.com](http://knowwpcarey.com).

Provided by Arizona State University

Citation: Twitter pattern: Those who don't know you well are more likely to retweet (2013, December 12) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-twitter-pattern-dont-retweet.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.