

A Quantitative Survey: Are Twitter Advertisements Effective for College Students?

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## **A Quantitative Survey: Are Twitter Advertisements Effective for College Students?**

**By Christia Brockman**

### *Abstract*

Social Media websites are rapidly being overrun by advertisements, but is this blitz of advertising destroying the social media experience? Twitter, one of today's most popular social media sites, increased its revenues from \$45,000,000 in 2010 to \$259 million in 2013. This exponential growth is surprising given the large portion of Twitter users who are between the ages of 18 to 25 with lower annual incomes. In analyzing whether advertising on Twitter is effective on college students, statistical results from a survey conducted among college students at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, reveal that Tweeters in this sample group were mostly ignoring the advertising onslaught. With the large user base of college-age Tweeters as a prime target and the advertising world's unquenchable thirst for new advertising opportunities, what methods will clever advertisers and their ad agencies think of next to attract the attention of Tweeters?

### *Key Words:*

Twitter, Advertising, Persuasion, Social Media, Media Effects

### **Introduction**

The race for advertising space around the world has reached a critical turning point of change, but is far from being over. With the constant development of new media outreach sources, such as Twitter and Facebook, some would suggest the race is just beginning. Social Media platforms "enable people to send messages, images, and video that can be read or seen by large numbers of people" (Berger). Having rapidly become one of the main means by which most people communicate, advertisers have justifiably begun using social media sites to market to individuals utilizing increasingly clever methods. The advertisements are becoming more

prominent but less noticeable and specialists have found creative ways to incorporate advertisements into our regularly accessed media.

From print to television to the Internet, advertisement sightings have increased. Through additional social media platforms, advertising agencies are plastering marketing ideas wherever they see opportunities. Beginning on MySpace.com, and now filtering through Facebook and other popular social media sites, advertisements have become intertwined in almost every aspect of our lives. Twitter, one of the most popular social media sites to publicize on today, skyrocketed to over 500 million members in only six short years and has created a whole new outlet for advertisers (“Twitter Statistics”).

By using increasingly new approaches, advertisers seek to persuade consumers and positively affect their purchasing behavior. The advertising methods used on Twitter have exceeded technology limitations of the past and reached a new level of success. Not much research has been publicized on the effectiveness of various Twitter advertising schemes, but as an avid “tweeter”, or Twitter account holder, I am particularly interested in the persuasive effects that Twitter advertisements have on college students, who make up a large majority of Twitter users (Cheng and Evans). In order to analyze the effectiveness of Twitter advertising on college students, I will conduct a survey to be completed by college students who attend California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

## **Literature Review**

### *About Twitter*

Social Media first emerged in the early 2000s with the development of *Myspace.com*. This networking site allowed friends, family, employers, and others to communicate with each other quickly and set up an easy way for individuals to create identities, whether real or fake.

After the instant success of Myspace, numerous other websites of similar content surfaced, but none compared to the large following of Myspace. A few years later, in 2004, a new social media site, Facebook, arrived (“Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013”). Though it began as a communication outlet for college-age users, Facebook rapidly became popular around the world (Zeevi). Today, almost 2 billion people worldwide have a Facebook account (Zeevi). Since Facebook’s release, many new social networks, such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter, have developed and have been added to the short list of successful media sites.

Although many have tried to compete with Facebook’s mass following, very few have come close. Twitter has been fortunate enough to gain many users and is currently one of the leading social networks on the Internet. Twitter’s founders (Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams) combined to create the ultimate social media site. Incorporating the general purposes of emails, blogs, and text messages, Twitter launched in 2006. Giving Twitter its name, Stone compared “the short spurts of information exchange to the chirping of birds” (Strickland). With over 500 million members since its release and gaining approximately 135,000 new users per day, it seems clear that Twitter will continue to thrive for years to come (“Twitter Statistics”).

Twitter’s overall concept is one of *web syndication*, which can be described as an application that gathers information from one source and forwards it to various other destinations, much like email or blogging sites (Strickland). Members post short messages or “tweets” to others via their outgoing feed and in return, members are able to “follow” or view posts produced by their network of contacts, which can range from friends to celebrities to corporations. To make it simpler than many social websites that require you to send individual messages to each of your friends separately, Twitter allows you to “send one message to your

Twitter account, and the service distributes it to all your friends” (Strickland). Twitter uses the term *following* to explain the simple process by which members communicate. Ronca explains that “every time someone you follow posts a message to Twitter, that post will show up in your Twitter feed. And every time you post a message to Twitter, that post shows up in the feed of anyone who's following you.” Instead of sending out numerous emails and text messages to friends, Twitter simplifies the process, allowing members to update all followers in one click.

Many applications now stem from Twitter to assist members with their tweets, such as Tweet Deck and Twitpic. Tweet Deck is an accessory independent of a web browser that allows you to organize those you follow on Twitter into categories, making it easier to keep track of all posts (Ronca). This application also offers an option to show notifications based on categories rather than delivering a hodgepodge of various posts from different account users in one large jumble to your Twitter feed. Another popular application is Twitpic, which allows you to upload photos from your computer or smart phone to your Twitter feed (Ronca). Many other Twitter-related applications include helpful tools such as timed tweets or video uploading. Twitter is capable of many different functions to say the least.

Members use Twitter for various reasons, some of which include organizing social events, communicating with friends, and generating awareness for important causes. According to “Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013”, “most people use Twitter to keep in touch with their friends.” When broken down by gender, however, “posting status updates is the second most popular reason women use Twitter, while more men use it to find the latest news.” Other top usage results include work-related or research-related reasons (“Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013”). Breaking it down even further, “Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013” discovered that 53% of users

“retweet” the tweets of others, 55% share links to news stories, and 54% post general life observations. One of the most concerning statistic to come from this research was the large amount of Twitter members – i.e. 24% – who post their current location. Given the overwhelming concern regarding Internet safety, this number is surprising. Twitter users have also found many other ways to utilize the media site for their personal needs.

Unfortunately, Twitter has recently generated a flood of negative feedback, primarily due to the expanding role of advertising on the site. Despite this, Twitter has still created a positive name for itself in educational and corporate settings. Educators are using Twitter to create platforms in which students can communicate with one another about class topics, and 72% of companies in the United States use Twitter to not only update their employees, but to also instill a family atmosphere with customers and clients (“Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013”). Many non-profit agencies looking to raise awareness have also opened Twitter accounts in order to inform more people about facts and statistics relating to their causes.

Today, out of over half a million Twitteraccount holders worldwide, 60% of them are female and 40% are male (“Social Media Statistics 2013 – Facebook vs Twitter vs Pinterest”). According to “Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013,” the average Twitter user can be described as a 20-something, Hispanic female who “had previously attended college, lives in a city, and makes either <30K or 50-75K.” Whereas Facebook draws in a slightly older crowd, mostly between the ages of 35 and 55, Twitter is more utilized by those in the age range of 25 to 35 (“Social Media Statistics 2013 – Facebook vs Twitter vs Pinterest”). 60% of those who own a Twitter account have had some college experience and 17% of users have a Bachelor’s degree. Interestingly, these rates are higher than those of Facebook account holders (“Social Media Statistics 2013 – Facebook vs Twitter vs Pinterest”). Given that most

Twitter users are younger and either in or possibly just out of college, it is not surprising to learn that in terms of income, a majority of Twitter users earn less than \$50,000.00 annually. In comparison, Facebook, which has a higher average age range, statistically, has more high-income members. Advertisers use this demographic information to develop advertisements geared toward the majority of consumers on the website. Furthermore, “the top 3 countries to have the greatest penetration of Twitter users are the Netherlands, Japan, and Brazil” (“Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013”). But the top country in terms of Twitter accounts is the United States. 27.4% of all registered Twitter users live in the U.S. and most reside in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago (Bennet). Oddly enough, out of nearly 2.1 million Internet users in the U.S., or 78% of the population according to “The 2012 Statistical Abstract” from the United States census, only “8% of US Internet users have Twitter” (“Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013”).

Like most social media sites, Twitter has its share of limitations. Firstly, “tweets can only have up to 140 characters before the system cuts off the rest of the message for cell phone users” (Strickland). Although members are unable to share lengthy posts, this text-length constraint allows users to rapidly scroll through many posts in a short amount of time and teaches individuals how to “get to the point”. Another drawback that some find irritating about Twitter are the usage limits, which include a maximum of 250 direct messages per day, 1,000 tweets per day, and 1,000 follows per day (“Twitter Limits (API, updates, and following”). While many users do not see the point in constricting a member’s actions, Twitter’s creators have imposed these limits for good reason – to prevent the entire site from encountering overloading problems and to avoid sending error alerts to all accounts. Fortunately, very few users reach these limits in a single day, allowing the site to function properly.

Even with the Twitter's few drawbacks, the social media site has earned top marks. The amazing statistics generated from this social media platform reveal that it is the market leader. In 5 days, 5 billion tweets are posted ("Twitter Statistics"). On a daily basis, 177 million tweets are sent and received ("Twitter Stats Infographic and Twitter Facts from 2012 and 2013"), and 9,100 tweets happen every second ("Twitter Statistics"). While sending and viewing tweets, Twitter members spend 3 times as much time on Twitter than on Facebook, averaging 36 minutes per viewing ("Social Media Statistics 2013 – Facebook vs Twitter vs Pinterest"). This statistic again adds to the copious amount of reasons why advertisers are so interested in this social media website. Moreover, 43% of users tweet or post from their smart phones, making it very easy to access in their spare time ("Twitter Statistics"). In terms of profit, Twitter is arguably one of the largest grossing social media sites (following Facebook) because of its large advertising market. In 2010, Twitter brought in a mere \$45,000,000 in advertising contracts revenue. In 2012, Twitter generated \$259 million from advertising revenue alone. This number is projected to increase to roughly \$399,500,000.00 in 2013 ("Twitter Statistics"). With advertising as its main source of income, Twitter generously offers many advertising options to companies, but is that what the Twitter consumer wants? The debate over mass advertising on Twitter is hotly contested across the site, but this does not detract from the fact that Twitter is nonetheless extremely successful.

### *History of Advertising in Social Media*

Advertising has been utilized for centuries to persuade society to do many things, such as purchase a specific brand of cereal or register for the military. Some advertising campaigns date back to 100 BC. Advertisements first found their way into print media, then into radio and television, and now on the Internet. The invention of the World Wide Web in 1990 led to the

largest shift in media buying in the last century (Burton). In recent years, advertising has taken center stage and can be found in, on, and around everything we see, touch, or hear. The purpose of advertising is to influence a consumer's behavior, to change a consumer's attitude, to inform the consumer, and to create positive association with what is being advertised (Woolley). By doing this, advertisements flood the universe of mass media. Although more recent, social media platforms are no exception and increasingly face the wrath of consumer overload. Many social media site users, such as those on Twitter, express criticism about the colossal amount of advertising found on popular sites. Nevertheless, the large number of followers on social media platforms creates the perfect place to advertise.

Along with almost every other form of media, social media sites have been targeted by advertising agencies and have become flooded with advertisements. Employing advertising techniques developed over twenty years ago, advertisers use banners, which were first seen on the HotWired site and featured in ads for Sprint and AT&T (Fox). These banners, which are compatible on both computers and cell phones, remain viewable until closed or "clicked on," which takes the user to another web page to view whatever is being advertised. Luckily, pop-up advertisements, which are ads that are magically displayed on screen when triggered by visiting a specific site, are not very common anymore because of their widely known hatred amongst consumers. And even if pop-up advertisements emerge, pop-up blocking tools, found on most computers, prevent the ads from being seen, giving advertisers additional reasons to cut the pop-up method ("Why Do Pop-Up Ads Still Exist?"). With that being said, in rare cases, one wrong click and you could send your computer into a black hole of pop-up ads.

Myspace and Facebook have quickly found their sites to be the new face of advertising. They display advertisement feeds on the sides of their media sites and allowed users to view

advertisements at will instead of forcing customers to view pop-ups and causing them to get irritated and uninterested.

In 2006, the same year Twitter was founded, advertising agencies took it one step further with social media advertising methods. YouTube began to sell video advertising time that preceded various popular YouTube videos. These ads became known as *in-video ads*, *participatory ads*, and *pre-roll ads* (Fox). Twitter then became the first site where real-time advertising can occur instantaneously and without cost through posts tweeted within its global community. In 2007, Facebook began to utilize *target advertising*, which pairs advertisements to match the Facebook account holder's social interactions and interests (Fox). Shortly thereafter, *Viral advertising* became very popular in the late 2000s. This form of advertising required Internet users to constantly visit the same video or picture, which would then be shared across various social media sites, thus doing exactly what advertising agencies intended and increasing the advertisements' distribution (Fox). As time passes, advertisements are becoming more targeted toward individuals and are allowing consumers to select what they want to see advertised. This begs the question: What will advertising agencies come up with next?

The advertising change from print to radio to television to Internet was both quick and effective. With less consumers reading the newspaper and more of an audience on the Internet, the shift of advertising has been necessary, but not accepted by everyone. Many people avoid areas of their lives that begin to become too materialized. In today's day and age, however, this is nearly impossible, and people are learning to cope with the overwhelming tight grip advertising has on their daily lives. The main goal of advertising is to make consumers or customers aware of the benefits of what is being advertised and how an individual could benefit from the product, service, etc. Some new social media sites, such as Facebook, have started to

use persuasive methods targeting an individual's specific needs or interests. This technique grabs the attention of its targeted audience and in turn, makes it more likely that the consumer or customer will try what is being advertised. Social Media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, which only allow for snapshot advertisements, utilize ideas from the Elaboration Likelihood Model to assist their efforts.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

#### *Elaboration Likelihood Model*

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo, "important variations in the nature of persuasion are a function of the likelihood that receivers will engage in elaboration of (that is, thinking about) information relevant to the persuasive issue" (O'Keefe). This model, similar to that of the heuristic-systematic model, seeks to explain how people are persuaded by advertising messages. In most cases, those who are receiving a persuasive message will engage in "elaboration relevant to the persuasive issue" (O'Keefe). The amount of elaboration determines how effectively a person was persuaded.

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model "persuasion can be achieved through two general avenues" – a *central route* or a *peripheral route*. In the central route, receivers thoughtfully develop their opinion regarding an advertisement by examining the message and considering all its options. In order to process a message using the central route, an individual must be motivated, able to process the message, and the message must have strength to its argument (Woolley). In comparison, the peripheral route of persuasion does not closely inspect the advertisement but instead looks to heuristic cues, such as whether the individual likes the person communicating the message or not. Other heuristic cues, which could help persuade a receiver peripherally, include the speaker's credibility, a general consensus of how other people

feel about the advertisement, or how long and how many arguments are made in the message (O'Keefe). According to the model, elaboration is higher in the central route of processing than when processed peripherally.

Many factors can assist or limit a receiver's ability to process a message or advertisement, regardless of the route. For starters, an individual will elaborate more if his or her mood and overall attitude is in line with the mood of the advertisement (O'Keefe). Additionally, if an advertisement contains multiple sources with multiple arguments, a receiver has the potential to elaborate more or to lose focus. But if the advertisement is *relevant to an individual* or a receiver has a *need for cognition*, then he or she is more likely to be motivated to stay engaged (O'Keefe). O'Keefe points out that the two main reasons people are not motivated to process an advertisement in a central or peripheral manner is if they are distracted or already have knowledge of the topic.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model does have its flaws. First, the model recognizes there are other methods or routes to persuasion, and not all of them follow this path of central or peripheral processing perfectly. Additionally, the possibility that variables, within the message or advertisement, play multiple roles does exist (O'Keefe). Limitations of this theory do not inhibit the model from being used as a core reasoning behind the advertising thought process of consumers. O'Keefe reveals that "people are trying to reach conclusions about what views to hold, and they do so on the basis of evidence that is available to them."

### *Uses and Gratifications*

Social Media platforms and other different media types have special qualities about them, which make them susceptible to different types of usage, which in turn helps make media effective. Explained by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, people use certain communication

channels and choose to select and interpret specific messages because an individual receives some type of gratification from the media outlet. This model shifts “the focus from the direct and undue influence of the media on passive and isolated individuals to active audience members selecting and using the media” (Rubin). In the past, there were fewer types of media, and what the media delivered to readers, listeners, or viewers was what the media wanted the masses to receive. Now, with the complex variations of media types, individuals are more likely to choose the content to which they are exposed. The Uses and Gratifications Theory is very prevalent in the set up of the social media site Twitter, in which users select who they want to follow and only have to view tweets they find interesting.

The Uses and Gratification Theory contains three main elements, which help explain why people choose to view certain media: motivation, activity, and involvement. People will seek the media that they need to feel satisfied. Some underlying reasons, as explained by Dr. Julia Woolley, include entertainment, escape, relaxation, learning, identity, and companionship, amongst many others. As stated previously, Twitter users utilize the site for various different reasons, including some of those just mentioned. Individual characteristics also lead to the gratifying effects of viewing some media types more often than others. The different characteristics include: lifestyle, life position, and personality (Rubin). These broad differences can be broken down into many sub categories, such as aggressiveness, age, social capital, life satisfaction, etc. (Woolley). Many researchers including Papacharissi, Rubin, Kaye, and Sjoberg have attempted to lay out the motives for using the Internet and all of them generated similar lists to the gratifications list above (Rubin). People use media with purpose and wish to gain something from their efforts, even if it is just to pass the time.

Implications for the Uses and Gratifications Theory stem from the reasons as to why an individual viewed a medium in the first place. Some possible effects of using media comprise of enjoyment, knowledge, media dependency, aggressiveness, etc. (Woolley). Sometimes the reason one uses media does not always result in the type of gratification an individual was hoping for. For example, if a Twitter user scans through his or her Twitter feed, depending on who the user follows, that individual could gain knowledge or see something irritating that in turn breeds aggression. As researchers have pointed out, the theory comes with a few limitations. For instance, people question if the audiences are truly “active” and whether or not this theory can actually be defined as a theory. Additionally, this theory assumes that users can understand their motivations for using a media type, but is this true? And lastly, is the theory overall too specific (Woolley)? Nevertheless, the Uses and Gratifications Theory helps demonstrate media’s effects on users.

### **Rationale and Research Questions**

Media is becoming more complicated and therefore harder to research. The Internet and the social media sites found on the World Wide Web are more complex than previous media outlets, but are still considered media. New media is similar, yet very different from older media. For starters, new media is much more interactive and diverse. The modern form of media also allows audiences to be more selective and create an identity through personalization (Metzger). Many mediums overlap and make it difficult to just focus on one type of media at a time. On the other hand, this also leads to *hypertextuality*, or the “degree to which media narratives may be received in nonlinear versus linear ways” (Metzger). New media also offers a greater success rate in global outreach, the ability to transport media more easily, and allows for greater social connectivity. With new media, especially that found on the Internet, comes a

broader array of information, making it nearly impossible to analyze anything in a simple manner (Metzger). But of course, to ease my curiosity of whether advertising on Twitter is effective or not, I'm still going to try.

### *Research Questions*

RQ1: Are Twitter advertisements effective for college students?

RQ2: How often do college students tend to click on Twitter advertisements?

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

This study was conducted at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Sixty undergraduate college students with varying degree studies participated. Of the sixty subjects, 35 were female (58.3%) and 25 were male (41.7%). The mean age of the subjects was 20.7 years old, with a standard deviation of 1.49 years. The subjects' years in school were as follows: 5 Freshman (8.3%), 18 Sophomores (30%), 10 Juniors (16.7%), 27 Seniors (45%), and 0 Graduate Students (0%). Results showed that 31 subjects or 51.7% of the 60 participants currently had a Twitter account, while 29 subjects did not. The 31 subjects who had a Twitter account were the only responses used to address the research questions stated above.

#### *Survey and Procedure*

In this study, participants were selected and asked to fill out a survey, consisting of twenty questions, to the best of their ability. (See the attached as Appendix A). Survey questions inquired about a subject's Twitter usage and their vulnerability to advertisement schemes. I chose to do a survey because not only is it the most objective way to collect data, but also has the highest response rate. The first set and majority of surveys were conducted in KINE 109-01 (Bowling), where a variety in age levels and school years at Cal Poly are common. The

remaining surveys were handed out individually in and around the University Union Plaza to those passing through or lounging in between classes.

*Measures: Survey*

The questionnaire began with a few demographic questions including age, gender, and year in college. Question #4 asked if the participant has a Twitter account. If the subject responded no, the participant was done with the survey, while those who selected yes, continued on to the following 15 questions. The next section of questions requested each participant to estimate their Twitter usage in a day, in a week, and in a month by writing in numerical responses for each. To discover whether participants used their Twitter account for the most common of reasons, participants were then asked to reply with their level of agreement to four statements, which included using Twitter for: social connectivity, sharing information, entertainment purposes, and professional networking. These four statements were answered in Likert scale form, with answers ranging from Disagree (1) to Agree (5). Next, participants were asked to identify whom they followed and answered by making a distinguishing mark next to each item in a predetermined list. The list included the following options: Friends, Peers, Celebrities, Professional Athletes, Comedians, Companies/Work Places, Informational/News Related Sources, Motivational Speakers, Fitness and Nutrition Specialists, and Other. For the option of Other, participants were able to explain who they follow by writing in a response. Using the same list, subjects were additionally asked to select the one category they follow the most.

The remaining portion of the survey asked questions specifically relating to advertising on Twitter. Questions #14 and #15 asked individuals to respond with a level of frequency from one to five as to how often each of these experiences occurred, with one (Never) and five

(Always). Question #14 asked how often subjects see advertisements on their news feed and question #15 inquired how often subjects click on advertisements to view the further information, if ever. The survey then directed participants to return to the predetermined list of possible people they follow and select (1) all those whom the subject follows who advertise and (2) the one Twitter category who advertises the most. To end the survey, participants returned to the Likert scale, one being Never to five being Always, to estimate their frequency of experience with the following three incidents: 1) How often do advertisements on Twitter positively alter your perception of what is being advertised? 2) How often do advertisements on Twitter persuade you to purchase or pursue what is being advertised? 3) How often do advertisements from Twitter users provoke you to “unfollow” them? At this point, subjects had fully completed the questionnaire and returned the packet to me.

### *Survey Statistics*

Results from the survey were calculated by hand or generated using SPSS Statistical Software. As stated previously, results showed that 51.7% of participants have a Twitter account, while 48.3% of people did not. When asked to write in how many times Twitter account holders accessed Twitter per day, some chose not to respond. Of those who did respond (18 participants), the majority responded in the range of zero to three times (58%). The remaining 42% fell within the range of 5-20 times per day. The next item on the questionnaire, which asked how many times an individual goes on Twitter per month, began to showed a large gap in data. Of those who filled in a numerical answer for this portion (18 subjects), nine participants (50%) wrote they use Twitter 0-3 times per day, and nine subjects (50%) stated they use Twitter four or more times in a day, with one individual explaining he or she uses Twitter about 140 times per day. Incrementally so, when asked how many times per month participants

used Twitter, 12 of 21 respondents used Twitter four times or less, with the majority using Twitter only once a month. Eight subjects responded with answers ranging from 5 to 60, and one outlying individual estimating he or she use Twitter 4,200 times per month.

Looking into why participants used Twitter reeled more precise results. 100% of those who stated that they have a Twitter account, or 31 participants, answered the following four survey questions completely. Findings showed that a majority of Twitter account holders use Twitter for entertainment purposes or to pass the time, generating a mean response of 4.26 with a standard deviation of 1.13, explaining most participants Agreed or Somewhat Agreed with the statement. Participants were split when asked if they used Twitter for Social Connectivity. The mean response was Neutral (3) with a standard deviation of 1.39. When asked if participants use Twitter to Share or Gather Information, the mean was found to be at 3.65 or between Neutral and Somewhat Agree. The standard deviation held at 1.14. Professional Networking was found to a significant reason why most individuals use Twitter. The mean came out to 1.81 with a standard deviation of 1.17. The majority or respondents (18) selected Disagree in response to using Twitter for Professional Networking.

When examining whom participants follow on Twitter, 30 of 31 subjects (96.7%) responded to this survey question, as well as, to the following question that asked who they follow the most. 90.3% of participants who have Twitter said they follow Friends and 70% selected they follow Celebrities. 60% of the sample followed Professional Athletes and Comedians, and 50% follow News or Information Sharing Twitter accounts. Only 16.7% follow Motivational Speakers, while 16.7% also follow Other. Some of the fill in responses for Other included Animals, Politicians, and College Greek Life accounts. When asked who they follow the most, the most common response was Friends (40%), and the second most common response

was Celebrities (23.3%).

## Results

Turning to the advertising portion of the survey, my research questions began to be answered. Many statistics from this study can be combined to decide whether advertising on Twitter is effective or not, but one question specifically revealed the answer to question two, which asked “How often do college students tend to click on Twitter advertisements?” Out of 31 subjects, 77.4% declared they Never click on advertisements. Interestingly, 0% of those who took the survey and used Twitter said they Always click on advertisements, while one person said they do Often, and one said they do Sometimes. Furthermore, 74.1% of participants said they Sometimes or Often saw advertisements on Twitter and when asked about advertisements on the accounts they follow, 27 of 31 subjects (87%) responded. 44% responded that the Celebrities they follow advertise on Twitter, and 37% agreed that Professional Athletes and News Twitter accounts advertise as well. Surprisingly, when asked who advertises the most, News and Informational Accounts won the title. Only few participants thought Friends, Peers, or Comedians advertise on Twitter.

One subject did not complete the last three questions on the survey, bringing the participant total down to 30. With a mean of 2.13 and a standard deviation of 1.04, most subjects thought Twitter advertisements positively altered their perception of what is being advertised Occasionally. In fact, 12 of 30 subjects (40%) selected Never and 40% also selected Neutral. Only two people from the sample of participants with Twitter accounts selected Often, and no one agreed that advertisements on Twitter Always positively altered their perception. Next, 73% of participants stated that they are Never persuaded by advertisements and 0% admitted Twitter advertisements persuaded them. The only question of this portion of the survey that showed a

large discrepancy among participants was the following questions, which states: “How often do advertisements from Twitter users provoke you to “unfollow” them?” 33% of responders revealed advertisements Never make them want to unfollow a Twitter account and 33% of responders suggested advertisements Often make them want to unfollow a Twitter Account.

### **Discussion, Limitations, and Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand if advertiser’s efforts on Twitter to persuade and inform college students are effective or basically useless. With research pointing out that a majority of those on Twitter were of the college age or had recently graduated college, I assumed that a majority of those I surveyed would own a Twitter account. To my surprise, approximately half of my sample had a Twitter account, but not as many as I had originally expected. After completing the survey and analyzing the results, many things were in line with what I had anticipated, and many other things baffled me. Firstly, consistent with various published research of Twitter, 58% of those who participated in the survey and had Twitter were females. As an avid Twitter user, probably the most astonishing piece of information from this survey was how little people use their Twitter account. With all the easy-access methods through smart phones or iPads, I was very surprised to find that only one participant consistently visited Twitter more than once a day throughout an entire month, suggesting that Twitter’s influence on college students may be dwindling.

Additionally, I personally use Twitter to connect with others, primarily friends, and figured many Twitter users around my same age similarly used Twitter considering its “Social” Media affiliation. Going against my assumptions, I found that of those who do go on Twitter occasionally, for a majority of people, it is primarily to Pass the Time and for Entertainment. Research suggested that many Twitter users link Twitter to Professional Networking, but

following my survey, it seems this is not the case for my sample of college students. When generating a list of categories of people found on Twitter, I figured Friends and Celebrities would get the most hits, but found it interesting that Comedians and Professional Athletes were not far behind.

The portion of this research that should be most relevant to those in the advertising industry is the following: 75% of Twitter users surveyed answered that they see advertisements either sometimes or occasionally, but most people never click on the advertisements to see more information and no one said they always click on advertisements. With this information, it seems that people are using heuristic processing when it comes to advertising on Twitter. In finding who advertises on Twitter the most, it seems Twitter users are doing just that and advertising agencies have already caught on to the Elaboration Likelihood Model technique. Twitter accounts whom many think to be the most credible and potentially attractive, such as News accounts, Celebrities, and Professional Athletes, tend to be those who advertise more. Considering these three Twitter account types are also some of the most followed by those surveyed, advertisers seem to be making the right decisions when it comes to who they advertise through, but does who posts the advertisement really matter?

Even with advertising agencies effectively utilizing noteworthy Twitter account users to spread awareness, survey findings demonstrate this form of advertising still has a low success rate in those who view the advertisement, if they see it at all. Sample results showed that sometimes advertisements positively alter perception, but not always. Findings also revealed that a majority of people are never persuaded by advertisements, not even a little. With so much advertising plastered across our lives, it would make sense that people are now becoming immune to them. The final question of the survey regarding the urge to unfollow someone, if

they advertise, fell short of my expectations. Many said often, but the same amount said they never feel provoked to unfollow a Twitter account that advertises. I imagined that more people would unfollow those who advertise, but again, my results did not support my reasoning. In fact, no one responded to this question explaining that they always unfollow Twitter users who advertise. So are advertisements on Twitter effective? Given these statistical results, I would say no.

Throughout the research process, a few problems arose that were unfixable after the time of discovery, which led to small limitations within the data. Some participants in the survey did not write in numerical responses when asked how many times they used Twitter per day, per week, and per month. Some chose to answer one question and not another, even though the directions stated, “please provide numeric response for each blank space”. Furthermore, there were a couple other random questions in which one or two subjects opted not to answer the question, which shifted results. One of the biggest problems with the survey was found when inputting whom each participant followed *the most* and who they followed who advertised *the most*. To my dismay, multiple subjects selected multiple Twitter account categories instead of just one as instructed. This discrepancy slightly threw off the frequency of which categories participants actually thought fell into *the most* description for each set of data.

In the future, a few changes would result in a better research process overall. The sample size could be larger and include individuals outside of the college age range to verify that even though only 50% of college students surveyed had a Twitter account, college students still contribute to the majority of Twitter users. Also, to determine if females do in fact make up more than 50% of the users on Twitter, I think it would be beneficial to survey an equal number of males and females. Directions within the survey should be made clearer with accents such as

bolded words, highlights, underlines, etc. to make sure participants follow the directions more efficiently.

Social Media sites continue to become more popular each day and advertisers still feel that these platforms are the easiest places to influence potential clients or customers. Advertising may be effective on most social media sites, but after the results concluded from this study, Twitter may not be the best place for them. The ability to be selective and speed through advertisements on Twitter, unlike old media, such as television, puts control in the hands of the consumer. Research results, such as those found in this study, expose the ineffectiveness of advertising on social media sites similar to Twitter. But with the extensive amount of creativity inherent in advertising agencies, it is only a matter of time before the new evolution of advertising creates a more effective statement on Twitter.

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**Appendix A: Survey**

1. Please state your age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Circle One: Male Female
3. Circle your year in college: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Grad Student
4. Do you have a Twitter account? Circle one: YES NO

If you answered NO to Question 4, you have completed the survey. Thank you for your time!

If you answered YES to Question 4, please answer the following questions:

How often do you use Twitter (please provide numeric response for each blank space):

\_\_\_\_\_ times per day

\_\_\_\_\_ times per week

\_\_\_\_\_ times per month

For the following statements, please select your level of agreement. (Circle ONE)

1. I use twitter for social connectivity.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree

2. I use twitter for gathering information or sharing information.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree

3. I use twitter for entertainment purposes or to pass the time.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree

4. I use twitter for professional networking.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree

From the following options, please select who you follow on Twitter. (Check all that apply)

- Friends
- Peers
- Celebrities
- Professional athletes
- Comedians
- Companies/Work Places
- Informational/News Related Sources
- Motivational Speakers
- Fitness and Nutrition Specialists
- Other      Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

From the same options as above, please select who you follow the most. (Check ONE)

- Friends
- Peers
- Celebrities
- Professional athletes
- Comedians
- Companies/Work Places

- \_\_\_\_\_ Informational/News Related Sources
- \_\_\_\_\_ Motivational Speakers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fitness and Nutrition Specialists
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other      Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

For the following statements, please select your frequency of experience. (Circle ONE)

1. How often do you see advertisements on your Twitter Feed? Circle ONE.

- |       |              |           |       |        |
|-------|--------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| 1     | 2            | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| Never | Occasionally | Sometimes | Often | Always |

2. How often do you click on advertisements to view them?

- |       |              |           |       |        |
|-------|--------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| 1     | 2            | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| Never | Occasionally | Sometimes | Often | Always |

From the following options, please select Twitter user(s) you follow who advertise. (Check all that apply)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Peers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Celebrities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Professional athletes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Comedians
- \_\_\_\_\_ Companies/Work Places
- \_\_\_\_\_ Informational/News Related Sources
- \_\_\_\_\_ Motivational Speakers

\_\_\_\_\_ Fitness and Nutrition Specialists

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

From the following options, please select the Twitter user you follow who advertises the most.

(Check ONE)

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends

\_\_\_\_\_ Peers

\_\_\_\_\_ Celebrities

\_\_\_\_\_ Professional athletes

\_\_\_\_\_ Comedians

\_\_\_\_\_ Companies/Work Places

\_\_\_\_\_ Informational/News Related Sources

\_\_\_\_\_ Motivational Speakers

\_\_\_\_\_ Fitness and Nutrition Specialists

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

For the following questions, please select your frequency of experience. (Circle ONE)

1. How often do advertisements on Twitter positively alter your perception of what is being advertised?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

2. How often do advertisements on Twitter persuade you to purchase or pursue what is being advertised?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

3. How often do advertisements from Twitter users provoke you to unfollow them?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

Thank you for your time!