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BRAND COMMUNICATION IN TWITTER – A CASE STUDY ON ADIDAS

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Abstract

In recent years, communication in public social media increasingly affected enterprises. Internet users began to share information about products, brands, and companies. Research currently focuses on investigating this form of communication by using quantitative methods in order to get a better understanding of it and of its relevance for companies and society. However, little is known about how enterprises themselves spread information in social media and how stakeholders talk about brands and products. In our work, we investigate communication genres directed from stakeholder-to-stakeholder, from business-to-stakeholder, and from stakeholder-to-business. By doing this, we were able to broadly analyze the content of communication in social media.

In our research, we focus on the company adidas, an international manufacturer of sports clothes. We concentrate on the awareness aspect and adapted a theoretical model in order to evaluate company-related communication in Twitter. Our case study includes 289,513 tweets which were collected on 60 consecutive days. In order to identify genres and to answer the research questions, we manually analyzed 500 randomly chosen tweets as well as all those tweets published by official corporate accounts. We come to the conclusion that communication in social media is indeed of high importance for adidas. Furthermore, we show that adidas enters the communication in Twitter strategically to increase the awareness of their products.

Keywords: Twitter, Customer, Social Media, Awareness.

1 INTRODUCTION

Today, social media continue to have a growing relevance. Facebook, for example, grew by 13.4% in 2011 and has reached 116.8 million US users. This is more than a third of the whole US population. Twitter shows an increase of users by 31.9% in the US in 2011, but remains at a lower usage level of about 23.8 million US users (eMarketer.com, 2012). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), social media is a generic term for online applications, which allow the creation and sharing of user generated content. Often, the terms Web 2.0 and social media are used synonymously. Others suggest that Web 2.0 and its ideological and technological changes were the basis for the development of social media, such as social network sites (SNSs), blogs, and microblogging (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009).

Recently, companies have realized that they cannot satisfy Internet users by simply providing a website. They are aware that further effort is needed to exploit the new potentials of social media in regard to optimizing distinct value creation processes (Kietzmann et al. 2011). E.g. enterprises aim at improving their stakeholder management, stakeholder integration, open-innovation or crowdsourcing activities. In contrast to an internal usage of social media (supporting knowledge management among employees), these mentioned approaches focus on stakeholders as the main target group.

Until now, for most companies, public social media such as Facebook or Twitter are more or less black boxes of unstructured information and stakeholder interaction (Rui et al. 2010). In research, the impact of Twitter and other social media platforms for corporate communication has been studied in the last few years. Different investigations about the relevance and opportunity of those new channels were conducted. Thus, customers (and other stakeholders) are naturally interested in gathering information about enterprises (brands) and products through the Internet. In reverse, firms are interested in gathering information provided by customers and other stakeholders, e.g. opinions and complaints about certain products or the public reputation of the enterprise.

Academia has developed various approaches and models to identify specific topics and discussions in social media. Furthermore, studies have been conducted to analyze the content and extract relevant information (i.e. Sommer et al. 2011). In general, three directions of communication take place in public social media which are relevant for companies: (1) Business to stakeholder (B2S), (2) stakeholder to business (S2B), and (3) stakeholder to stakeholder (S2S). In this sense, the group of stakeholders includes customers but also other interested people (e.g. private persons previously to their buying decision, competitors, suppliers). Until now very little research exists about these types of communication e.g. regarding the amount of postings and the content of those interactions and there is still a lack of methods to gather and analyze those data. Therefore, it is difficult for enterprises to develop appropriate strategies for social media communication and to link their social media activities to the organizational goals (Culnan et al. 2010).

In the context of corporate communication in social media, the creation of awareness is a major goal for enterprises as well as for customers. Following Larson and Watson (2011), enterprises are interested in making their stakeholder aware of new products or campaigns (B2C), customers address the firms to create awareness on complaints about products or suggestions for product innovations (C2B), customers direct communication, both positively and negatively, to other customers to make them aware of brands and products (C2C). Following Berthon et al. (1996), this kind of bidirectional interaction and discussion can be clearly distinguished from the traditional PR/marketing and customer services, which is primarily conceptualized as unidirectional "customer notification".

We contribute to this field by investigating the three mentioned communication directions in Twitter for a specific company. As the most popular microblogging platform, Twitter enables users to spread short text information effectively and at low costs. Through the feature of retweeting it is possible to spread information to the followers of an account. Furthermore, by adding an @-sign users can directly address specific accounts (e.g. the company or stakeholders) publicly. The #-sign is used to signalize that a tweet contains information about a brand, topic or event.

In our study, we focus on communication in Twitter related to the company *adidas*, a global manufacturer and brand of sports equipment. We investigate tweets that were generated by the enterprise itself as well as tweets that were published by stakeholders. As a theoretical perspective, we focus on the construct of awareness, which has been introduced by Larson and Watson (2011) in the context of business-customer communication in social media. In this sense, awareness is understood as the ability to perceive and to understand addressed or freely accessible information. Furthermore, following Larson and Watson (2011), direct awareness creation, where the company is involved in the discussion (B2C and C2B), can be separated from indirect awareness creation, which takes place without participation of the company (C2C).

From the point of view of companies, awareness for a certain situation or for a specific context is the first step to develop appropriate response strategies. Therefore, by providing a rich case study on *adidas* we contribute both to the academic discourse as well as to the discussion of decision-makers in enterprises about how to improve corporate communication in Twitter.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: In the next chapter, we will provide an overview of related work. We will then elaborate the underlying research goals. In chapter 4, we will present the results of our case study and in chapter 5 we will discuss our results regarding the research questions. The paper ends with a conclusion and outlook for further research.

2 RELATED WORK

When studying related literature in the field of external corporate communication and social media, the term social media marketing (SMM) inevitably plays an important role. Lindic (2006) states that some marketing methods, such as Internet based media, have the potential to reduce costs and at the same time increase the efficiency of marketing. Harrison et al. (2006) support this hypothesis and suggest the Internet to be understood as a channel for information sharing which enables all stakeholders to communicate. As Richter and Schäfermeyer (2011) show, only little research has so far been conducted on SMM.

Bernoff and Li (2008) state that marketing is not limited to the promotion of products and services themselves but it also includes the promotion of brands and feelings about products and services. Liu and Ji (2009) show that Web 2.0 communities may be understood as open places which allow companies to learn more about customer's knowledge and preferences following a customer centric orientation (Schneider et al. 2008). For example, virtual communities may help to identify explicit and tacit demands of customers (Bernoff and Li 2008).

Gallaugh and Ransbotham (2010) conducted a study about Starbucks. They divided the phenomenon of social media communication into three dyads and combined them within the "*Megaphone, Magnet, and Monitor (3-M) framework*". Accordingly, Richter and Schäfermeyer (2011) investigate the interaction of SMM and conventional marketing in AISEC, a student organization. Some other studies developed strategies for researchers and practitioners; those studies differ with regard to the industry of interest (e.g. tourism: Xiang and Gretzel (2010), television: Lin and Peña (2011), finance: Senadheera et al. (2011), Stieglitz and Lattemann (2008)), the size of observed firms (e.g. small and medium enterprises: Gligorijevic and Leong

(2011)) or the analyses' emphasis, but share the fact that only little is known about the application of social media in companies.

Communication within Twitter is different from interaction in traditional web 2.0 platforms. Explicitly, Twitter provides an integral higher openness; theoretically, every Tweet is readable by everyone. Additionally, Bermingham and Smeaton (2010) attest the hypothesis that microblogs are easier to analyze by sentiment than longer documents e.g. blogs. Also, Rui and Whinston (2010) showed that Twitter is attractive for stakeholder communication and might become a "goldmine" for both researchers and practitioners to open the black box of (online) word-of-mouth. Sommer et al. (2011) present a methodology to identify Twitter posts, which are assignable to previously defined topics. They concentrated on the classification and analysis in terms of content with a sentiment analysis. Jansen et al. (2009) analyzed 150,000 tweets to investigate electronic (online) word-of-mouth regarding brands. They consider the overall-structure, the type of expression, and the sentiment. Findings show e.g. that 19% of Tweets mention a brand or organization. Additionally, they compared automated sentiment analyzing tools with a manual analysis but were not able to find significant disparities.

A study by Martin (2009) showed that "Twitter's audience retention rate [...] is currently about 40 percent" and Heil and Piskorski (2009) found that "the top 10 percent of prolific Twitter users accounted for over 90 percent of Tweets". Based on this, it could be assumed that the Twittersphere does not play a role in the communication around brands. However, several studies identified intensive use of Twitter as a platform for spreading information about enterprises, products, political parties and regarding reputation, providing relevance for branding and image creation (e.g. Stieglitz and Krüger 2011, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2012, Boyd et al. 2010, Tumasjan et al. 2010).

Until now only few studies analyzed corporate communication in the Twittersphere. Senadheera et al. (2011) concentrated on Australian banks operating in several social media sites by analyzing the given services and the options of using them strategically. Stieglitz and Krüger (2011) analyzed the dynamics of crisis in the case of Toyota. To explore communication patterns in a team using Twitter as an internal microblogging tool, Riemer and Richter (2010) conducted a genre analysis and showed that there is a vast difference between using Twitter in such a corporate context and in the public open network.

Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2012) revealed the impact of sentiments on retweet-behavior in the context of political communication. According to them, those tweets which include sentiment words (positive or negative emotions) will be retweeted more often than neutral posts. This aspect shows that patterns of communication and information spreading are remarkable in Twitter, but due to the very few existing studies, there is a lack of and a great need for understanding the communication around specific issues and brands. Based on this, it might become possible to develop more efficient social media marketing strategies.

3 RESEARCH GOALS

As the literature analysis shows, some research in the field of corporate communication in social media already exists. However, to our knowledge nobody has so far empirically investigated the role of the company within Twitter communication explicitly. E.g. it is unclear what kind of content is published by a company and to what degree stakeholders respond to messages of corporate accounts. Additionally, nobody has yet investigated what kind of content is directed to the company by stakeholders.

Based on the model of Larson and Watson (2011), we identified three fields of research which are related to awareness creation of brands and enterprises: (1) stakeholder to stakeholder

communication (S2S), initiated by stakeholders, (2) business to stakeholder (B2S), initiated by the firm, and (3) stakeholder to business (S2B), initiated by the stakeholders. Furthermore, Larson and Watson (2011) identified community building and community monitoring as further fields of corporate activities, which we will also briefly reflect on in our discussion. Larson and Watson (2011) suggest the following activities and targets for each of the three perspectives. Since these assumptions are very general and not validated in practice, we discuss, critically reflect, and empirically investigate each of these perspectives by addressing three research fields (RF):

RF1: Stakeholder to Stakeholder (S2S)

“Customers make one another aware of products and services, an important antecedent of market share complicates by the moderating role of sentiment.”

By analyzing Twitter communication among stakeholders we will investigate what kind of content is discussed and what amount of S2S communication takes place. We focus on asking if it is true that stakeholders make other users aware of products and services by studying topics (genres) that are discussed. Based on our findings, we aim at elaborating implications for companies.

RF2: Business to Stakeholder (B2S)

“Firms alert customers about new products and services. [...] Firms alert customers about potential problems.”

Very little is known about what kind of strategies companies follow to communicate with their stakeholders in public social media. Therefore, we ask what kind of topics the company itself initiates and what kind of information the company addresses to the stakeholders (e.g. alert stakeholder about new products and services).

RF3: Stakeholder to Business (S2B)

“Customers make firms aware of product flaws.”

According to the B2S communication, there is only very little research about what kind of topics are addressed from stakeholders to the companies. To empirically validate the assumptions of Larson and Watson (2011), we ask if it is true that stakeholders report about product flaws or related topics.

4 CASE STUDY

The analysis of corporate communication in public social media is still a new field of interest. Therefore, studies that provide empirical insights are lacking. In view of this, we decided to make a first step by conducting an explorative study on a specific case.

4.1 Background of the Company

The *adidas* AG with its headquarters located in Germany is the guise of around 170 subsidiaries and the employer of 46,824 people (finanzen.net 2012). A broad range of products reaches a broad public, so there is a high relevance of the brand especially in the market of sports equipment and style products. Moreover, the brand *adidas* is one of the innovators in using social media for doing campaigning and image cultivation. *adidas* focusses their communication operations in Twitter, Facebook, and Blogs.

A major reason why we selected *adidas* for our case study is that the company, based on their business model, is strategically interested in creating high awareness of their brand in the public and their statement to be “consumer focused” – which includes increasing the reputation of

products and the brand's image. Since *adidas* attempts to create stakeholder value (adidas group 2012), it can be assumed that there is an extensive communication in Twitter regarding the brand-related keywords.

4.2 Methodology

To investigate the enterprise's communication strategies we extracted communication in Twitter and built our case study upon the everyday-communication around the keyword "*adidas*". The reasons for choosing Twitter are a) the API, which provides the opportunity to download the relevant communication, b) the large ground with a high number of users and tweets, c) the constructions of messages related to others (retweeting content) despite the shortness of the postings, allows the identification of answers and replies (@replies as @accountname), d) *adidas* communicates via Twitter through various accounts, and e) the high timeliness character of the medium (see Kwak et al. 2010; Milestein et al. 2008). Within the investigation period, we tracked 289,513 tweets in English containing the keyword "adidas", including both the postings published by 15 different official enterprise accounts as well as those published by 169,014 different stakeholder accounts. During a timeframe of 60 days - from December 2011 to January 2012 (26.11.2011 to 25.01.2012) - we recorded the elapsed communication in Twitter related to the brand *adidas*.

Our methodological design is based on genre analysis, consisting of different steps which are specially assorted to the explored research questions. By adopting this method we were able to characterize communication in social media as genres. Yates and Orlikowski (1991) introduced the approach of genre analysis in their analysis of organizational uses of email. This method draws on traditional models of genre from rhetoric. In this sense, genres are defined as "typified rhetorical action based in recurrent situations" (Miller 1984). Overall, genre analysis can be described as classification of "typified acts of communication" based on their form and substance (Yates and Orlikowski 1991). Additional work in this field has been published by Swales (1990) who characterizes a genre as "a class of communicative events" having "a shared set of communicative purposes and similar structures, stylistic features, content and intended audiences".

We referred to genre analysis in order to categorize tweets of different directions (stakeholder-to-stakeholder, business-to-stakeholder, and stakeholder-to-business). By doing this, our aim is to provide a better understanding and overview about the contents of communication in Twitter regarding our case company. To increase the validity of this method, we developed a coding scheme (definition of genres) which has been used by two independent researchers in order to classify the tweets. To address the research fields RF1, RF2 and RF3, we conducted a manual analysis of a sample of 500 tweets from the stakeholder communication and of all Tweets posted by the official *adidas* accounts. The number of 500 tweets sample is chosen arbitrarily. These tweets were collected by random drawing with the help of a software prototype.

By conducting manual content analysis we get a deeper insight about what content the participants are talking about and what kind of communication patterns they are using. Following our methodological approach, we categorized the postings into those which are published by the official *adidas* accounts and those which are published by stakeholders. By stakeholders we not only mean the followers of an official *adidas* account, but we also include users who placed the keyword "adidas" in their postings. The clear-cut delineation of the stakeholder group is limited because we are not able to tell whether a user is a customer of *adidas* or not. Furthermore, it is not possible to filter out users who act as *adidas* distributors. But in a logical conclusion they maintain a relationship to the brand and they are stakeholders. In some cases, the content shows that products of *adidas* are worn by users, but in general the account profiles do not show the comprehensive relationship to the brand.

As a first step, we tracked and documented all those tweets containing the keyword “adidas” by using a software prototype. The following metrics are included in the collection of data: V1: unique twitter-ID, V2: time-stamp, V3: account name, V4: Hashtags, V5: classification as retweet, V6: full content, and V6: hyperlinks. We stored our data in CSV format and imported them into the statistics software SPSS. The collected dataset was cleaned through the consolidation of different term notations in a Lucene-database. We extended the dataset with the variables V7: Issue; V8: @reply; V9: URL or other Linkage; V10: used#1; V11: used#2 and V12: used#3. To obtain an overview of the complete dataset, we used SPSS to describe it. Numeric metrics like quantity of unique users or @replies were counted.

4.3 Results and interpretation

The collected and prepared dataset of 289,513 tweets containing “adidas” can be divided into (a) 274 tweets posted by 15 active and official *adidas* accounts in the period of investigation (B2S), whereas 28 official *adidas*-accounts are registered in Twitter, (b) 286,835 tweets published by other accounts, respectively stakeholders, to the public and to other stakeholders (S2S) and (c) 2,404 tweets addressing the brand (S2B). Observing the whole dataset, we figured a daily posting average of 4,670 tweets with a per capita posting rate of 0.58 Tweets because of a quantity of 169,029 unique participants. We found 200,991 unique tweets, meaning that these tweets are originals and not retweets or edited retweets. Hence, 88,522 tweets are posted twice or more. 91,051 tweets were identified as retweets (content added with a RT). We counted 107,787 tweets as @replies which directly address another user (without RT). Examples of such tweets [TX] are presented in the appendix of our article.

4.3.1 Stakeholder-to-Stakeholder Communication

Larson and Watson (2011) state that stakeholders draw other stakeholder’s attention to a brand’s products and services in social media. Proving this statement on a filtered dataset excluding all tweets posted by any *adidas*-account, we identified 10 different genres. The identified genres and their quantitative occurrences are presented in table 1.

The genre “product and sales promotion” is clearly the most used communication genre (35.4%). Trying to explicate, we assume that distributors of *adidas* products post tweets in this genre frequently (e.g. shops selling *adidas*-products such as the accounts *LucozadeUK* [T1] and *DealwhereAU* [T2]). In addition to this, we identified private accounts posting in this genre. These accounts seem to aim at making other users aware of specific products (e.g. [T3; T4]). Therefore, it can be stated that stakeholders indeed aim at making other stakeholders aware of products and services to a limited degree as Larson and Watson (2011) have stated.

| | | frequency | percent |
|-------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| genre | product/sales promotion | 177 | 35,4 |
| | S2S wearing | 75 | 15,0 |
| | S2S statements about the brand | 55 | 11,0 |
| | S2S answer | 37 | 7,4 |
| | S2S wish | 34 | 6,8 |
| | game | 30 | 6,0 |
| | S2S state other persons’ style | 30 | 6,0 |
| | S2S question | 25 | 5,0 |
| | brand-related news | 24 | 4,8 |
| | S2S recommendation | 10 | 2,0 |
| | other | 3 | 0,6 |
| | total | 500 | 100 |

Table 1. Identified genre in the S2S communication around adidas.

Investigating the usage of @replies, we found only 24 (of 177), i.e. 13.6%, tweets in the genre “product and sales promotion”. Thereby, we assume that users who published content matching this genre do not aim at getting answers; they rather want to share information. This genre is dominated by a distributor (see above), which may not be interested in dialogic @replies.

Based on our genre analysis, 75 tweets were classified as “S2S wearing”. Within this genre, stakeholders report that they wear *adidas* products [T5; T6; T7]. Following Zhao and Rosson (2009) and Java et al. (2007), this sharing of ad-hoc experiences about a specific brand is a new phenomenon. The genre “S2S statement of other persons’ style” includes 30 tweets and is closely related to “S2S wearing”. Here, users comment on styles of celebrities and of people from their environment.

Despite these generally positive postings, we could also identify critical statements within the genre “S2S statements about the brand”. Stakeholders posted comments about the brand both positive, like giving praise [T8], and negative by criticizing the company [T9]. From the enterprise’s point of view, tweets of this genre should be monitored and analyzed because they seem to be indicators for the perceived image of the brand [T10]. Furthermore, based on genre analysis in Twitter, enterprises may evaluate campaigns, e.g. regarding their reach and the perceived influence on stakeholders [T11].

So far, we only looked at the different genres but not at the possible features of Twitter, namely hashtags and @replies. With a hashtag (e.g. #*adidas*) stakeholders achieve an extremely wider publicity not only because the followers get the user’s tweet but also subscribers of the used hashtag. In our sample 88 tweets include hashtags. Related to *adidas* the most frequently used hashtag is #*adidas* counting 15 tweets. Several other hashtags are underlining opinions in tweets or are showing that someone utters something emphatically: for example, #*YouSoundStupidShutUp* or #*turnMeon*. *adidas* itself used three different hashtags, which were adopted by the stakeholders. In the whole dataset the hashtag #*adidas* was used 11,752 times, #*teamadidas* 153 times and #*adidascommercial* 17 times. Overall it can be stated that hashtags were not used very frequently and therefore did not play an important role within this company-related communication.

Nevertheless, if a user asked a concrete question, e.g. where to find the next store (25 S2S questions in the sample, i.e. [T12]), users answered with an @reply (47 S2S answers and recommendations in the sample, i.e. [T13]). This is not an intensive dialog but a tendency that users do not only post information without regarding or referring to other UGC.

4.3.2 Business-to-Stakeholder Communication

Regarding the tweets posted by official *adidas* accounts, we identified the content genres listed in table 2. The most frequent genre is “brand-related news (brn)” by 31%, which includes all tweets concerning enterprise-related issues like news from the sport resort [T14] or from fashion [T15]. We also categorized tweets into this genre that have a characteristically public relation content, e.g. about a new sponsoring [T16] or brand news [T17]. In this case, we likewise found tweets, which are cross-mediating brand-issues, meaning the content refers to content from another medium, e.g. a TV show [T18]. Most of the tweets in this genre are monologic, which might be the enterprise’s strategy. Only few tweets have a kind of public addressee (“Guys, we...” [T19]) or are enriched with a @reply (16.5%).

In contrast, the genre “service and customer care” (18.4%) is naturally more dialogic. However, in none of the observed cases a real dialogic communication situation took place. Rather, it is a singular answering of questions and a reference to other media [T20; T21]. Every tweet (100%) in this genre is enriched with an @reply. We suppose that the brand conveys the feeling of being perceived and important to the stakeholder, which might strengthen the relationship and

contentment with the brand. Technically, the @reply is used to make sure that the user notices the answer. This genre is mostly used by the brand accounts *adidasUK* and *adidasZA*. Location-related accounts appear to be the first contacts in questions around the brand.

| account (follower) | genre | | | | | | | | total |
|---------------------------|--------|----------|-------|----|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | answer | question | games | HR | brn ¹ | product ² | serv/ccare ³ | spec/disc ⁴ | |
| adidasUK (30.082) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 38 | 3 | 53 |
| adidasNEOLabel (1.150) | 5 | 9 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 40 |
| adidasZA (7.607) | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 5 | 10 | 4 | 34 |
| adidasGroupBlog (7.192) | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 23 |
| adidasITP (347) | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 23 |
| adidasAU (7.508) | 7 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 21 |
| adidasGroupJobs (8.812) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 21 |
| adidasoriginals (192.044) | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 20 |
| adidasSingapore (225) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| adidasUS (76.348) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 11 |
| adidasGolf (15.751) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| adidasIndonesia (5.132) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| adidasMY (17.311) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| adidasnewsalert (2.195) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| adidasfootball (10.075) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| total | 28 | 11 | 18 | 17 | 85 | 39 | 50 | 26 | 274 |

Table 2. Identified genres within the B2S communication around adidas.

Product announcements and representations are summarized in the genre “product”, the third popular genre (14.2%) in the B2S communication. In this category, information about product lines, news about product features [T22; T23] or references to other brand distributors [T24] are published. This genre is quite similar to “specials and discounts” (9.5%), in which the stakeholders are alerted about temporal product discounts in stores or online-shops. Examples are invitations to join-in and take advantage of these specials [T25; T26].

The genres “question” and “answer” (see table 2) go with the enterprise’s participation in conversations. 89% of tweets belonging to the genre “answer” directly address a specific user for the same reason we supposed for the genre “service and customer care”. To consolidate a relationship to the brand’s stakeholder, Caridi (2011) showed in his Facebook-research that the

-
1. Brand-related news
 2. Information about product-releases or product lines
 3. Service- and Customer care-issues
 4. Information about specials and discounts

participants of a network enjoyed being entertained in the interaction with a brand. In our sample, we detected that some games were played within the communication. In our example, *adidas* initiated games to make stakeholders aware of and to market the product line Neo Label [T27]. Another realization of this entertainment idea is the invitation to special entertainment offerings outside Twitter [T28].

Despite such special games or entertainment campaigns, Twitter users play retweet games. The participants of those games retweet the content if they meet the conditions mentioned in the tweet (e.g. retweet if you wear *adidas* [T29]). By initiating entertaining content, it is possible to raise the number of followers and moreover to make the brand part of the everyday communication. In our case study, we did not find any retweet game which was initiated by any *adidas* account, but the brand's name was mentioned in four different retweet games.

We also identified tweets which can be categorized as belonging to the genre Human Resources (HR). Within the investigation period, the special account *adidasGroupJobs* posted 14 tweets containing job offerings in the *adidas* group. At this point, we cannot evaluate whether this is just a further channel to post one and the same offering but we suppose that *adidas* considers a candidate in its Twitter followers. We observed that posts from the HR account *adidasGroupJobs* were retweeted by other official *adidas* accounts.

The separate exploration of the different *adidas*-accounts lets us assume that there is not one corporate strategy for publishing information in Twitter. Some accounts seem to only spread brand-related news, probably automatically, like *adidasSingapore*. Others are more balanced in their assignment to our genres like *adidasNEOLabel*, which might be an indicator of a strategy of the account (no automated news distribution). Furthermore, a young brand seems to need a broad and more target-group-specific communication. Therefore, many genres are covered by this account and the communication is more interactive and dialogical.

4.3.3 Stakeholder-to-Business Communication

2,404 tweets of all collected tweets address or mention the brand directly by use of an @reply. The most mentioned brand account is by far *@adidas* (51,7%), followed by *@adidasUS* (23,2%), *@adidasoriginals* (10,2%) and *@adidasfootball* (5,2%). The remaining 9.7% are spread across 17 other brand accounts; seven brand accounts were not addressed.

Based on a sample of 100 tweets which we selected randomly with due regard to the above proportion, we analyzed the four leading accounts and categorized the following genres (see table 3). We detected “product and sales promotion” to be the most used genre (26%).

| genre | | | | | | total |
|-------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|------------------|-----------|-------|
| | | @adidas | @adidasfootball | @adidasoriginals | @adidasUS | |
| genre | product/sales promotion | 2 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 26 |
| | statement brand | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| | self-expression | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 12 |
| | statement sports | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| | other | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| | statement event | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| | game | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| | question wish | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| | brand-related news | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| | question product | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | statement product | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | question brand | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | question wearing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| total | | 57 | 6 | 11 | 26 | 100 |

Table 3. Identified genre in the S2B communication related to *adidas*.

We can state this for the following genre “statements about the brand”, too (see [T30]). The most @replies with the purpose of addressing were found in the genres “self-expression” and “questions and wishes” [T31; T32].

Tweets directly addressed to *adidas*-accounts do not contain hints about product flaws (maybe because of the investigation period). Hence, stakeholders do not report product flaws or related topics to *adidas*. Nevertheless, we identified some tweets about a not correctly working *adidas*-website or tweets with a complaint about *adidas*' strategic activities, but those did not use a direct @reply.

It has to be mentioned that in some cases the @-sign is not used to address the company. In these cases, the @-sign is used with the meaning of a #-sign. Therefore, the results, presented in table 3 have to be interpreted with caution.

5 DISCUSSION

Studying the communication related to *adidas* in Twitter without any exceptional situation (e.g. crisis or new product releases) showed that the involvement of the brand is low notwithstanding that there is a wide mass of stakeholders talking about products of the brand or image factors. There is a high potential in the medium to make stakeholders aware of the official brand accounts and about the information a brand is providing. In the case of *adidas* it seems that the users only follow *adidas* to show other participants of the network what they like but not to get in contact with the brand. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the communication is more monologic than dialogic. It needs to be proven whether there is a more dialogical communication when the brand-accounts showed a higher involvement to conclude if this fact is biased by the medium or by the involvement.

For an enterprise, the communication dyads S2S and S2B are very important for the conversion of communication strategies. More advantage can be taken of this medium because there is a vivid community, which is interested in the market niches the brand serves. Doing dialogical communication or to incorporate the users by motivating them to join in games or specials make the users feel as being more in touch with the enterprise.

The popular highlighting of brand accounts might be seen as a feature for the users' intention of self-expression. Often it is used to show other participants in the network that wearing *adidas* belongs to the individual style or is even a lifestyle. Monitoring these participants and integrating them into brand communication, like it is done in the games played in the communication, raises the number of positive tweets related to the brand and thus has the potential of amplifying the brand's image.

Larson and Watson (2011) postulate in their model, that “*Firms promote virtual brand communities in order to increase customer knowledge about the brand.*” With a content analysis of all the tweets published by one of the 15 active *adidas* accounts we found that *adidas* uses both types of the mentioned ways to build communities. Every official *adidas* account addresses a specific group of stakeholders indicated by the account name. Some accounts address the stakeholders grouped according to their location. Other accounts seemed to address stakeholders grouped according to their sports interests and *adidas* owns accounts addressing stakeholders with an interest in the brand in general or special product lines (see table 2).

Those accounts overall have 909,162 followers (it has to be mentioned that we did not check whether single user accounts follow multiple *adidas*-accounts). The most subscribed brand accounts are: *adidasrunning* (380,702 follower), *adidasoriginals* (192,044 follower) and *adidasUS* (76,348 follower). By being a follower, users are informed about the news of a brand.

In the context of company brands, following might also be an instrument of self-expression and to communicate to other Twitter accounts to be a fan of the product.

We interpret these results as the recognizable attempt of *adidas* to establish virtual communities around their brand. But we note that eying the stakeholder's usage of hashtags does not follow the same strategy. Stakeholders do not only use hashtags to build or reach a community around an issue, they also use them for highlighting a statement in the tweet content, like screaming out e.g. *#YouSoundStupiShutup* or *#wtfwasyouthinking*.

6 CONCLUSION

By conducting this case study we made the first step to provide empirical data about brand communication in Twitter. We identified communication in social media and identified genres of communication, which is initiated by stakeholders and the company itself. Furthermore, we were able to show that Larson and Watson (2011) were right in their statement that the creation of awareness can be separated into a direct and an indirect addressing of stakeholders. Regarding the direct addressing, we only found a small number of tweets and all of them are answers of questions directed at *adidas*. This is a vertex an enterprise should pay more attention to in the corporate communication strategy.

Taking a look at the hashtags *adidas* used, it seems to be part of a strategy that the account names and names of product lines also officiate as hashtags (*#adidas* or *#adidasneolabel*). Published *adidas* posts not only contain such brand-related hashtags, some official accounts used hashtags related to other issues in the network communication to take part in discussions (e.g. *#employeeloyalty*, *#Euro2012*, *#DavidBeckham*, *#green*, *#Uefa*, *#job*, *#ausopen*, *#BerlinFashionWeek*). In the S2S communication, genres could be identified clearly, but the group of stakeholders could not be differentiated with regard to their interest in *adidas*, e.g. customer or supplier. Based on our sample, we assume that in "product and sales promotion" most supporting tweets are posted by suppliers. Other genres could be summarized as self-expression. A monologue-communication, positive or negative, dominates the S2S tweets and mirrors the image of the brand. A sentiment analysis could go deeper into the nuances of the public opinion of the brand.

In the Twitter sphere, hashtags are used as instruments for tagging or building an issue around a keyword, but we were able to show that this role is a more subordinated role in communication-praxis. Despite of this finding, it is useful for enterprises and their issue management to be aware of the enterprise-related hashtags, to monitor related tweets and to refer to the self-created hashtags as often as possible to make them popular and established. Furthermore, a study on the virality of genre-specific content spreading will shed light on potentials of the use of word-of-mouth strategies in the public relation context (Aral and Walker 2010).

Adidas informs stakeholders about issues directly related to the brand and related issues such as sports and events in which *adidas* is present. Publishing this information is comparable to press releases, and in this sense it is not intended to motivate a dialogue with the followers. As already mentioned, the *adidas* philosophy is to focus on customers, which might be mirrored by the strategic dialogic communication expected in the genre "Service and Customer care" but this could not be assigned in the sample. Again, no discussion could be identified. This could be due to the entities of the medium or due to the enterprise's strategy. Regarding the limitations for a more customer centered dialogical communication the Twitter character is too limited. To conclude a strategy out of the communication patterns in genres, we need to also take social networks into account which also provide rich possibilities for brand communication. Based on our results, we can assume that *adidas* pursues the strategy to reach the different target groups

with different accounts with specified names. In this sense, each account follows a distinct strategy to address a specific target group (e.g. by varying communication types – informing, entertaining, issue-related, unidirectional or bidirectional).

The S2B Communications cover only a significantly small fraction of the total observed adidas-communication. It is assumed that other media or channels for questions, statements, complaints or orders are used to approach *adidas*. This assumption is supported by the usage of the addressing-instrument @reply as a highlighter or as mentioning the brand instead of a direct address. Statements on the enterprise and on sports-facts were addressed directly but without intending to motivate a discussion. For researchers in this field, we showed that the @reply is often used similar to the hashtag, so that it is methodologically needed to do content analyzing for separating dyadic content.

The research in Twitter is limited because the medium naturally is of lower media richness than other social media such as Facebook, especially regarding community building. Furthermore, because of the shortness of the Tweets, the exact delineation of genres is not given, so that these results show tendencies of genres. Additionally, the given genre categories are biased because the Tweets are classified manually and some people do have a different sense of irony and sarcasm, but this is one of the interesting problems of communication in social media.

Our study is of high relevance for the academic discussion in the field of social media communication. By delivering empirical data and by validating a theoretical model, we made a step forward in this field. Further research will be able to build upon our findings. Furthermore, we also contributed to the practical sphere. Managers get better insights about the importance of public communication in social media for their enterprises.

Despite the limitations of abundance of tweets and hence the content and communication patterns, we found the impact of the brand-related communication in the Twitter network to be considerable for public relations and marketing departments of enterprises and organizations. This study was able to show the intensity of communication regarding matters of adidas and its products. It needs to be analyzed whether this phenomenon depends on the type of product (emotional product), the image of the brand (young and sporty) or whether other factors influence this intensity. More studies focusing on these points are needed to conclude which strategy an enterprise could develop for communicating with its stakeholders and to attract them.

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EXAMPLES TWEETS

- [T1] *LucozadeUK*: Ding dong merrily on high! #Lucozadexmas continues: We will be giving away 3 adidas running goodie bags on friday RT & follow us to enter!
- [T2] *DealwhereAU*: ADIDAS ICE DIVE (BLUE) 100ml EDT SP - AU\$12.95
- [T3] *Tieramgp*: adidas Men's adiNOVA IV SG Soccer Shoe,Black/White/Light Scarlet,9 M US: Shoes by AdidasGreat for Soccer
- [T4] *quaG27*: It seems that Adidas launched a new line called Response collection. MUCH better than AdiZero and Barricade, tbh.
- [T5] *She_Trust_NoOne*: My Toes Freezing Cuz I Wore My Adidas Sandles Outside.
- [T6] *Ar15*: Me and my mommy got the same Adidas hoodie = _ =
- [T7] *_JussReTweet*: Mixin Nike and adidas.
- [T8] *Vicktoreaux*: #adidas is the best brand out there.
- [T9] *CoreyLeavitt*: adidas' website is so fucked up and annoying
- [T10] *madeChuckDMN*: I Remember When [***] Ain't Never Even Thought About Adidas. Now Everybody Got That Shit.!
- [T11] *TreyShaw2*: "The Champs Sports/Adidas commercial was really cool the first time it aired. But reallyyy annoying after seeing it every commercial break".
- [T12] *Jusi_J*: "Please does anyone know if there is any Adidas store in Lagos ?"

- [T13] *JayyyDuhhh*: "@King_Hyper go to mcfarland mall then! and you can get some adidas here !"
- [T14] *adidasZA*: "adidas congratulates the Mens Belgium Hockey Team for clinching the 2011 FIH Champions Challenge 1 in Johannesburg."
- [T15] *adidasSingapore*: "adidas Originals and Jeremy Scott take us behind-the-scenes to their Spring/Summer 2012 photoshoot. Showcasing a..."
- [T16] *adidasnewsalert*: "adidas and UEFA Extend Partnership for European Club Football"
- [T17] *adidasZA*: "Former SA National Mens hockey team player, Eric Rose-Innes, now also with adidas SA, poses with @katelouisewoods"
- [T18] *adidasGolf*: "TaylorMade adidas Golf CEO Mark King will be featured on TV show #UndercoverBoss (air date TBA)"
- [T19] *adidasITP*: "Guys, we know this space has been fairly inactive so far, but we will be using our Generation adidas trip as our social media introduction"
- [T20] *adidasUK*: " @mikeycarter You'll need to talk to the Online Shop directly for assistance. Tel: 00800 3787 4737 Email: service@mail.shop.adidas.co.uk ^nf"
- [T21] *adidasZA*: "@CARMagSA On our adidas Originals Facebook page. We will send out link once the pictures are up."
- [T22] *adidasZA*: "The adidas adiPower Predator boot has been named Boot of the Year by SoccerBible after a reader poll. Thanks to everyone who voted!"
- [T23] *adidasoriginals*: "The most comfortable pair of kicks from adidas Originals. Get them before everyone else #H3LIUM"
- [T24] *adidasUS*: "Check out the new adidas products @fitsugar is featuring. fitsu.gr/21245584"
- [T25] *adidasAU*: "Got a football wish this Xmas?Enter the comp on@SydneyFC Facebook page & Santa might reward you with prizes from adidas"
- [T26] *adidasZA*: "Last chance today! Get to the V&A Originals store before 4pm and get your adidas kicks customised by @SQEW8"
- [T27] *adidasNEOLabel*: "Do you have adidas NEO? Send us a photo of yourself in NEO! :D"
- [T28] *adidasNEOLabel*: "Mix it up and make your own at #adidasneo #playmobil <http://t.co/P3PmFQ36>"
- [T29] *AmLillyM*: "RT @iAmRome_: Retweet if you wear Jordans, Nikes, Vans, Blazers, Chucks, and Adidas (follow me)"
- [T30] *sIr_Khozay*: "Fuck @adidas for what they are about to do to my team, fuck em... #neverKickaManWhileHesDown"
- [T31] *publiracins2*: "I sleep standing up wearing Adidas superstars so that I can escape from my nightmares faster.â€?nThanks @adidas "
- [T32] *farfrmpractical*: "@adidasoriginals Can you give me more information about the Kinetic x Adidas "Animal Pack" Where can I get them from?"