Public Abstract

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Internet social networking devices like Twitter have increased in popularity between 2005 and 2010. Twitter is unique because of the brevity in which users interact with other users; Twitter messages, or tweets, are limited to 140 characters. Often in those messages are hyperlinks to other Web sites. Even when people are connected to Twitter, they feel compelled to click the hyperlink and navigate to another page. This thesis employs an experiment to determine what motivates Twitter users to click the hyperlinks in tweets.

The research conducted for this study looked at motivation, the uses and gratifications theory, and the matching theory of functionalism. All three areas were tied to the Internet and social networks.

A total of 153 people completed surveys that measured how they respond to hyperlinks in tweets. It was determined that people prefer to communicate with other people they know on Twitter, but not with people they are unfamiliar with. However, they are willing to get information from organizations that they do not have an emotional connection with.

The findings are important for businesses, especially news organizations, which reach out to people on Twitter. Media outlets can expect people will look at content posted on Twitter, but not necessarily interact with the media outlet.

It is important to note that the study discovered people's responses to tweets. It did not examine people's motivation to create tweets. This research takes a small step in understanding people's behavior with social networks.