

BRANDING AND COMMUNICATION ON TWITTER

A Thesis by

Renata Carvalho Britto

Bachelor of Communication, Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2007

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## BRANDING AND COMMUNICATION ON TWITTER

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.

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Deborah Ballard-Reisch, Committee Chair

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Lou Heldman, Committee Member

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Glyn Rimmington, Committee Member

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Leonardo Britto and Elisabeth Carvalho, those have always supported my decisions, to my sister, Fernanda Britto, who has always inspired me, and to my advisor, Dr. Deborah Ballard-Reisch, my professor, mentor, and friend during my time at Wichita State University

## ABSTRACT

New media developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century allows for conversations and interactions among people and organizations online. This capacity is referred to as social media (Safko & Brake, 2009). Twitter is the most active social media tool and influences the use of other social networks (Webster, 2010). Companies are entering Twitter to engage in conversations with their publics and modifying their branding strategies to work within this new medium (Jansen et al., 2009). This study attempts to understand how news media companies that use traditional media, are integrating social media branding strategies into their efforts to engage consumers. The main research question posed in this study is: *How are news media companies using branding strategies to create a relationship with their target audiences through social media?* To answer this research question, a literature review was developed, which presented definitions and theories of media, social media and branding. Additionally, data were analyzed from six news media companies present on Twitter through a thematic analysis. Specifically, tweets posted by three national and three local news media organizations collected over a two month period from February 1 – April 1, 2011 were analyzed considering premises and theories from McLuhan and Powers (1989); McLuhan (1994; 2002), Ong (2002), Poster (1995), Lévy, Li and Bernoff (2008), Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009), Kotler and Keller (2006), Hatch & Schultz (2002), and others. The results showed that news media companies are communicating to their audience in three manners: spreading information, promoting marketing strategies, and generating conversations. This study also presents the potential that companies have to develop an organizational identity on Twitter and social media.

*Keywords:* Media theory, social media, branding, Twitter.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

With the advance of technology and the development of the Internet, a social trend has emerged in which people use online tools to connect and share content with others (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Barnes, 2005) through social media. Twitter, an online network that can be accessed through different applications on computers, mobile phones and other technologies, is a specific social media tool that facilitates this communication (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). The Twitter user is a *twitterer* who connects to other users by sending *tweets* (messages on Twitter) in 140 characters or less (Boyd et al., 2010). Since 2008, Twitter usage has grown significantly. Twitter awareness in the U.S. rose from 5% of the public in 2008 to 87% in 2010, with 17 million Americans using the tool (Webster, 2010). Twitter is very connected to other social media tools, and user behavior on Twitter is associated with their behavior on other social networks (Webster, 2010). Because of its popularity and growth, Twitter has become a tool for public figures and companies to reach desired audiences (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Social media and its tools is a contemporary subject. Terms are still being defined and classified, and people's usage of the Internet is a growing area of research. Discussions are usually centered on the tools, instead of analyzing the shift in information distribution (Solis, 2007). The focus of the current study examines this shift by assessing the strategies used by six traditional news media companies on Twitter.

Twitter users are seen as leaders in social media, and because of that organizations and companies are trying to build conversations with them and establish positive images. After

discussing the potential implications of microblogging platforms, like Twitter, for businesses and organizations, Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009) concluded that:

Microblogging is a social communication channel affecting brand awareness and brand image, that managing brand perception in the microblogging world should be part of an overall proactive marketing strategy, and maintaining a presence on these channels should be part of a corporation's branding campaign. (p. 2184)

Twitter allows companies to understand how customers feel about a brand, and at the same time, it is a platform whereby they can connect directly with customers to build and enhance customer relationships (Jansen et al., 2009). In summary, everyday organizations understand the importance of social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are using these social media to communicate with their publics. This new way of connecting to current and prospective customers has implications for both traditional and emerging branding and marketing strategies. Such strategies have the potential to change the relationships between organizations, media, and audiences. Specifically, this study analyzes approaches to social media utilized by six news media companies and answers the following research question: *How are news media companies using branding strategies to create a relationship with their target audiences through social media?*

To answer this research question, the first chapter will define important terms, position current research on media strategies within a historical context, and provide a foundation for this study. Section one introduces the concept of media and how media affects society, and explains the development of media from the beginning of oral societies through the electronic age. It outlines pertinent foundational theoretical premises including: Definitions of medium and media as extensions of humans (McLuhan, 1994; 2002); the three stages of the development of society (Meyrowitz, 2005); the second orality (Ong, 2002); the second media age (Poster, 1995); and the cyberculture (Lévy, 1997). Section two builds a conceptual frame of social media. It presents

definitions, strategies, and current research on how social media functions and how it can benefit the branding and marketing strategies of companies (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Jansen et al., 2009). It also explains how Twitter works, its features, and introduces previous studies about Twitter usage. Section three integrates research to define brand, branding and other relevant terms based on Nemer and Souza (1993), Kotler and Keller (2006), and Aaker (1991; 1996). It also presents two approaches to branding: Corporate identity and organizational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

In the second chapter the methodology of the study is outlined, with research questions and hypotheses. The study involves analysis of data collected from six news media companies with established presences on Twitter. Their tweets, replies and retweets posted on Twitter.com were collected over a two month period. To analyze the data, a thematic analysis was conducted (Boyatzis, 1998).

In the third chapter, the themes that emerged from thematic analysis are presented, with a comparison of the results among news media organizations. In the fourth chapter, the data are analyzed and implications discussed within the context of the conceptual framework built in the literature review. In the fifth chapter, the conclusion of this project is presented, with the discussion that emerged based on the data collected and the thematic analysis. In addition, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research are presented. This project is relevant to studying current trends in social media, with theoretical lenses that correlate media theory, social media theory and branding theories.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review is divided into three sections that discuss (I) media theory, (II) social media premises and studies, and (III) branding strategies. First, to lay a foundation from which to begin understanding social media, section one will review traditional media theories and premises (McLuhan, 1994; 2002; McLuhan & Powers, 1989; Ong, 2002; Galbreath, 2011; Poster, 1995; Lévy, 1997). This section will posit definitions of key terms regarding media and explain media effects on society. It presents the idea that the main consequence of any medium is that it shapes the way people communicate, think, and organize (McLuhan, 1994). Theories developed by renowned scholars were extensively studied with emphasis on the impact of media in society. These theories were then used as a framework for understanding media, including how social media affects the ways in which people relate with each other, companies, and institutions (Li & Bernoff, 2008). In the second section, social media is discussed in relation to studies and strategies that were developed by Jansen et al. (2009), Li and Bernoff (2008), and Solis (2007). Twitter is also discussed with respect to prior research by Ballard-Reisch, Rozzell, Heldman, & Kamerer, (2011), Boyd et al. (2010), Java, Finin, Song, and Tseng (2007), and Webster (2010). The last section of the literature review presents definitions of terms based on branding theories, including brand, brand equity, identity, and image. It also presents two approaches to branding by Hatch and Schultz (2002), providing the foundation for analyzing the branding strategies target companies are using on Twitter to build a framework for data analysis.

## 2.1 Media Theory

This section of the literature review discusses media and its effects on society based on McLuhan's premises (1994, 2002) about media: The medium is the message, media as extensions of humans, media classifications as hot or cold, and the second orality by Ong (2002). A timeline outlining the relationship among media and cultural and social changes is developed. The timeline is informed by the following media theories: Galbreath (2011) communication evolution, McLuhan's (1994) discussions about oral society, print society, and electric age, the second media age by Poster (1995), and cyberspace by Lévy (1997). From this foundation, the review continues to a discussion of the emergence of social media.

Media, according to Strate (2005) are "the means, modes, and methods by which we operate on the material world" (p. 28). Technologies are media because they mediate between people and the environment. McLuhan (1994) saw media as extensions of humans, specifically, extensions of human bodies, minds and senses. For McLuhan (1994), numbers are an extension of our sense of touch, and writing is an extension of our sense of sight. Clothing is an extension of the skin, and roads and wheels are extensions of feet that were later developed into highways and cars. Print is an extension of the visual faculty and the fixed point of view. The telephone is an extension of ear and voice, having multi-sensory perception because it uses two senses at the same time. Television is an extension of the sense of touch, involving the maximal interplay of all senses (McLuhan, 1994). Different media translate senses into different materials and technologies, and these extensions affect the whole psychic and social complex. "...The personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7).

Based on McLuhan's discussion of electronic technologies, Barnes (2005) affirmed that electronic media are an extension of human nervous systems through a global network that connects people into a global village. In that sense, people use technologies and, at the same time, are modified by them. McLuhan (1994) said that media are always active metaphors in their power to translate experiences into new forms. In the global village, people are the form of information, moving toward the technological extension of consciousness. "Having extended or translated our central nervous system into electromagnetic technology, it is but a further stage to transfer our consciousness to the computer world as well" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 60).

McLuhan (1994) presented the idea that the medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls human association and action, and the message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs (McLuhan, 1994). To Barnes (2005), the medium is the message because it directly shapes information and how it is understood. According to Strate (2005), content monopolizes attention, but the medium shapes the way we communicate, think, perceive, and organize. The effects of a new technology are not at the level of opinions and concepts, but media changes sense ratios and patterns of perception (McLuhan, 1994). In that sense, it is important to study the effects that any new medium has in society in order to understand the medium itself.

Innis, McLuhan's mentor (McLuhan, 2002), said that communication media are the essence of civilization, and the predominant media of each age defines the historical period. McLuhan's writings complemented this perspective, affirming that media impacts individuals and society independent of the content of the message that is being transmitted by shaping behaviors and thoughts (McLuhan, 2002). When a new technology is developed the entire framework of society changes, not only the picture within the frame. To McLuhan (1994),

technological media are like natural resources because society and economy depend on them. Because of that, technologies are always going to result in social patterns of organization that affect power relations, discourses and markets (McLuhan, 2002). Media alter not only habits of life, but patterns of thought and valuation (McLuhan, 1994). With that in mind, it is important to understand how media has changed society, in order to understand how it can still affect perceptions.

According to Ong (2002) humans evolved according to orality and literacy which in turn directly affected media development. Orality is the verbal and oral expression of thoughts, and literacy is the literate form of thoughts and its emergence from orality (Ong, 2002). Humans developed first oral communication, and writing was developed after as a consequence of orality. The author approaches oral cultures and writing diachronically and historically, comparing time periods and understanding the evolution that lead to writing. This discussion helps to understand not only oral speech and writing, but also the print culture that came as a result of writing, and the electronic culture that builds upon orality and literacy. Galbreath (2011) developed a timeline that illustrates Ong's discussion and divides communication history.

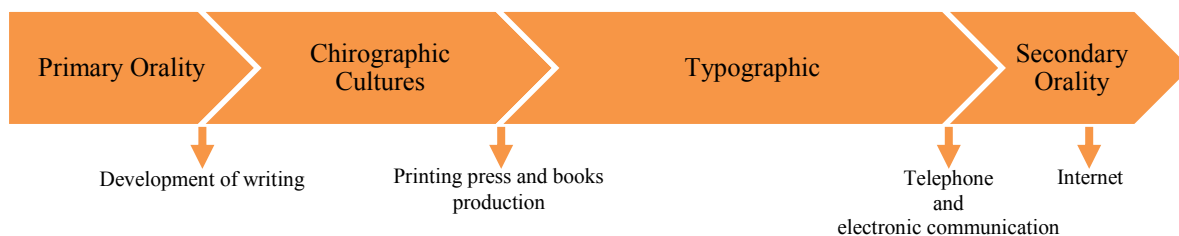


Figure 1. Communication timeline adapted from Galbreath (2011).

### **2.1.1 Primary Orality**

The timeline is divided in four phases: Primary orality; chirographic cultures; typographic; and secondary orality. The time frame for each phase relies on different cultures in different locations. The first phase, primary orality, is the pre history phase before writing was developed (Ong, 2002). According to Galbreath (2011), the time frame for this phase for the Americas was from 14,500 B.P. to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for Europe is from 33,000 B.C.E. to the Middle Ages, and for Archaic Greeks it was from 3,000 to 700 B.C.E. Ong (2002) considers the orality of a culture that has never been in contact with writing and printing as “primary orality”. Ong (2002) argues that sound determines expressions and processes of thought. The sound of words only exists when a word is being said. The oral expression is noticed when it is happening, it cannot be noticed when it does not exist. In the oral culture people have no texts, so they have to organize their thinking through mnemonic patterns, or think memorable thoughts. It has to be highly rhythmic, intertwined with memory systems, and has to determine even sentence structure. To help people remember important information, rhythm and mnemonic aids were developed. In an oral culture, thinking in a way that is not patterned would be a waste of time, because thoughts would be lost after they were expressed. “In an oral culture, experience is intellectualized mnemonically” (Ong, 2002, p. 36). McLuhan (2002) affirmed that when society depended on oral speeches, people listened to information and passed it on, creating a culture of community. Since speeches were immediate and ephemeral, life and knowledge could not be separated. Stories were told and retold, and the group that had the memory was the holder of the knowledge. Because of that there was not much distinction between self and group, and the level of group identification was high (McLuhan, 2002). Ong (2002) affirms that although humans have a lot of different ways to communicate, articulated sound is the most complete one.



### **2.1.2 Chirographic Cultures**

The second phase presented by Galbreath (2011) is entitled “Chirographic Cultures”. This phase is characterized by the development of writing and it started first with the Sumerians 3,500 years B.C.E. when they developed the cuneiform. When writing came, it was a complement to oral speech, and not a transformer of verbalization (Ong, 2002). Language though, is an oral phenomenon. All humans have a language, and the majority of them are spoken and heard by sounds (Ong, 2002). According to Ong (2002) language is so oral, that only 78 of the 3000 languages that exist are committed to writing and have a literature. Writing, in another way, enlarges the potentiality of language, converting dialects to grapholects. “A grapholect is a transdialectal language formed by deep commitment to writing” (Ong, 2002, p. 8). Writing is related to sounds to yield its meaning. Orality existed for a long time without writing, while writing never existed without orality. But language studies had focused on written texts because of the relationship between writing and studying (Ong, 2002). Ong (2002) argued that people in oral cultures learn through apprenticeship, and do not “study”. Because of the study that became possible with writing, literates started studying language itself. Ancient Greeks were fascinated with the art of rhetoric. But speeches could hardly be studied since after the speech there were no records. Writing did not reduce orality in the beginning, but enhanced it with the possibility to organize the speech. Even speeches were studied as written texts. According to Galbreath (2011) the Europe chirographic culture started in 550 A.D. when Latin became institutionalized as the teaching language; in 1200 paper was manufactured in Europe and writing was mostly done by scribes.

### 2.1.3 Typographic Phase

The third phase, typographic, started in Europe in 1452 when the printing press with moveable metal type enabled the mass production of books (Galbreath, 2011). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century printing began to affect the teaching of rhetoric and provided a foundation for a new scientific era. According to Mouzelis (2008), the modern period regards the social type of arrangements that became dominant after the English industrial revolution and the French revolution between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before these revolutions the majority of European people who could read and write were in elite groups, but in this phase literacy spread across different social and economical classes. “These arrangements entailed unprecedented social mobilization that weakened people’s ties with their local, self-contained, non-differentiated communities and brought them closer to the ‘centre’, i.e. integrated/incorporated them into the much wider political, economic, social and cultural arenas” (Mouzelis, 2008, p. 147-148).

The advance of the print technology “...brought in nationalism, industrialism, mass markets, and universal literacy and education” (McLuhan, 1994, p. 172). Print documents in this phase disseminated plans for industrialization and advertisements for mass-produced goods. It made people more literate and helped to constitute nations by codifying developing laws, history, and spreading news (McLuhan, 1994). At the same time, print separated groups and made them homogeneous, for example: Students, workers, prisoners, etc. (Meyrowitz, 2005). Print technology developed basic functions of media, storing and expediting information sharing (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). Print media separates knowledge from the moment that it is articulated, so that information can be manipulated and edited. It also separates knowledge from the knower and gives more importance to the act of reading or having access to knowledge

(McLuhan, 1994). Knowledge assumed the status of truth and groups were divided among those who “had” the truth and those who did not. For McLuhan (1994), print technology started the consumer age, showing people how to organize on a systematic linear manner.

#### **2.1.4 Secondary Orality**

The fourth phase, secondary orality, started on 1876 with the invention of the telephone and electronic communications (Galbreath, 2011). It initially started on the western side of the world, but it spread globally. According to Ong (2002) the “secondary orality” is the new orality presented today with the electronic age, which is sustained by electronic devices that depend on writing and printing to exist. The primary oral culture hardly exists today in its strict sense. One of the reasons is because written words are residue, while oral tradition has no residue or deposit. Words can be grounded in the oral field, but writing puts them in a visual field. In that way, literature reduces oral expressions to variants of writing. Consequently, Ong (2002) presents the term “preliterate” that presents orality “...as an anachronistic deviant from the ‘secondary modeling system’ that followed it” (Ong, 2002, p. 13). Orality is forever attached to literacy and destined to produce writing. And literacy is important for the development of science, history, philosophy and other fields. Literacy consumes its oral antecedents, but it’s infinitely adaptable and can restore its memory too.

The electronic age emerged during this phase, with electronic technologies developed in the last half of the nineteenth century (Nebeker, 2009). It was made possible by the development of roads and the transmission of electricity that spawned new industries like the telegraph, radio, movies, television and all “speed-of-light technologies” (McLuhan & Powers, 1989, p. vii). According to McLuhan (1994), action and reaction occurred almost at the same time during the electronic age. Electronic media were the first to compel commitment and participation, and they

brought the possibility of seeing the world without having to leave the living room. At the same time, the electronic age allowed the existence of different realities that could be heard and seen through movies, television, and radio. McLuhan (1994) also affirmed that the age of electronic media was the Age of Information, where information became a commodity. The business of human beings became learning and knowing, and the electric speed created a center of information everywhere and margins built by distances and time were reduced. Electronic media created a field of interacting events in which everyone could participate. The simultaneity of communication, in which two people could talk to each other even though they were far away, or an entire country could watch or hear a program simultaneously, made people accessible to every other person in the world.

However, the person listening or watching is passive, rather than active (McLuhan, 1994). This new technology brought the development of mass communication through television and radio. The electronic age sold knowledge like a commodity through media that were immediate and ephemeral but not tied to a particular place because knowledge was broadcast. Broadcast media changed the perception of place and time, creating what McLuhan (2002) called the “global village”. In this village, information was sold through different media that were competing to be heard and seen. The electronic age created a culture of cells, with different groups trying to promote their own interests.

But the secondary orality phase is also characterized later on by the introduction of the Internet (Galbreath, 2011). According to Meyrowitz (2005), the electronic culture is characterized by global idiosyncrasies. He named this phase as postmodern, characterized by the integration of members of all groups into a common sphere of experiential opinions accompanied by the recognition of the idiosyncrasies of individuals. According to Kellner

(1995), this postmodern phase started around the 1970's, with people learning to live with "an immense fragmentation and proliferation of new images, information, and technologies" (p. 17). This stage encompasses the current time period where electronic media blur private and public behaviors because people are encouraged to value personal revelation, exposure and intimacy (Meyrowitz, 2005). While media used to be divided by audiences, through computers information can be shared across different demographic groups. Although people are still physically attached to the local community, they share a lot of information with others in different parts of the world. The world is becoming what Meyrowitz (2005) called "glocalities", "places that are shaped by both their local uniqueness and by global trends and global consciousness" (p. 40). Electronic media brings a broader but shallower sense of "us", where members of the world are growing more alike, but members of particular traditional groups or communities are growing more diverse (Meyrowitz, 2005). Because the electronic age is the context within which social media emerged, it will be further discussed.

#### **2.1.5 Discussions of the Current Media Phase: Poster (1995), Lévy (1997), O'Neill (2005), Barnes (2005), Littlejohn & Foss (2008)**

Poster (1995) defined the society of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as "the second media age" and discussed society as shaped by computer-enhanced communications, interactive technologies, and network communications marked by a communication system that allowed messages to be widespread through long distances and in short time periods. These characteristics were first achieved through electrification, then through digitalization. Film, radio, and television were characterized by a small number of producers sending messages to a large number of consumers. This age was also called the first media age (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008) and characterized as: "centralized production (one to many); one way communication; state control, for the most part;

the reproduction of social stratification and inequality through the media; fragmented mass audiences; and the shaping of social consciousness” (p. 292). For Poster (1995), this broadcast model did not only characterize the first age, but was the only possible way of having media (few producers and many consumers). But with the introduction of what Poster (1995) called “information superhighways”, the integration of satellite technology, computer, television, and telephone, the system of communication shifted to one of multiple producers/distributors/consumers. This shift brought a new configuration of communications that collapsed the boundaries between definitions of producers/distributors/consumers and took society to what Poster (1995) called the second media age.

The second media age was marked by the introduction of communication systems based on the shift from mass communication delivered by one medium, to many different media delivering more personalized and interactive messages. “The shift to a decentralized network of communications makes senders into receivers, producers into consumers, rulers into the ruled, upsetting the logic of understanding of the first media age” (Poster, 1995, p. 33). For Littlejohn and Foss (2008), the second media age is decentralized, two-way, beyond state control, democratizing, promoting individual consciousness, and individually oriented. And this is exactly the potential today with the possibilities that arises with new technologies and social media.

Computer technologies make possible progress that would not be possible without it, such as a spell-checker on a word processing system, or mathematical calculations with calculators. As Lévy (1997) summarized, computerization of society will lead “toward the creation of a new medium of communication, thought, and work for human societies” (p. XX). But most important, the computer and digital technologies bring the possibility of a shared or

collective intelligence (Lévy, 1997). For Lévy (1997), collective intelligence refers to the action of uniting not only ideas but people constructing society. Through digital networks people are able to exchange messages, access public information, construct virtual communities, develop friendships, political projects, cooperative efforts, and most important communicate freely. In that sense, people construct a collective intelligence that is “a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills...The basis and goal of collective intelligence is the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals” (Lévy, 1997, p. 13). Lévy (1997) believed that the development of these sophisticated systems of networked intelligence, or collective intelligence, has the potential to project humanity into a new phase of social evolution.

For Lévy (1997), the collective intelligence is shared in a cyberspace that provides an unbiased and democratic space where knowledge can be shared. The interconnection of computers through the Internet expands a global cyberspace in which elements of information are in virtual contact with one another and anyone who happens to be connected. According to Lévy (1997), cyberspace refers to an original mode of creating and navigating within knowledge and the social relations that this phenomenon brings, rather than only a new medium of information transmission. Cyberspace is “designed to interconnect and provide an interface for the various methods of creation, recording, communication, and simulation” (Lévy, 1997, p. 119).

A similar discussion developed by Poster (1995) said that the second media age is also marked by the Internet, a bi-directional and decentralized media. And in order to understand the overlap of human and machine, there is a need to understand the interface. “An interface stands between the human and the machinic, a kind of membrane dividing yet connecting two worlds

that are alien to and also dependent upon each other” (Poster, 1995, p. 20). Computers and the Internet bring a division between human and machine that implies two realities, the Newtonian space and the cyberspace (Poster, 1995). Interfaces are between these two spaces and are the pivot of emerging sets of relations between human and machine. According to Poster (1995), the phenomena of communicating at a distance, sending and receiving digitally encoded messages, being interactive, and stimulating the construction of virtual communities are the most popular applications of the Internet. Interfaces are constructed to enable virtual communities that provide areas for public messages and exchanges. For Poster (1995), the idea of many talking to many is the bigger feature brought by computers and the Internet. People who can afford to have a computer and an Internet connection “can be their own producers, agents, editors, and audiences” (Poster, 1995, p. 36). Unlike any other media of the first age, it is cheap, flexible, quick, and readily available.

The discussions of these new communication systems tend to be more about the increase of information exchange and the ways it will reflect on existing individuals and institutions. Although, for Poster (1995), electronically mediated systems of communication change the way we think about the subject and will alter the shape of society. “The combination of enormous distances with temporal immediacy produced by electronic communications both removes the speaker from the listener and brings them together. Electronic communications systematically remove the fixed points, the grounds, the foundations that were essential to modern theory” (Poster, 1995, p. 60). The changes will be broad, changing the culture in the way identities are constructed. Poster (1995) believed that electronic media are supporting a profound transformation of cultural identity. “Telephone, radio, film, television, the computer and now their integration as “multimedia” reconfigure words, sounds, and images so as to cultivate new



configurations of individuality” (Poster, 1995, p. 24). For Poster (1995), the modernist print-oriented communications are associated with education, capitalism/socialism, bureaucracy and representative democracy, while the postmodernist, electronic-oriented communication is characterized by destabilized and fragmented identities. At the same time that identities are being fragmented, society is characterized by a double movement, one of individuals and institutions, and another of information flows (Poster, 1995). The digitalization of information facilitates its instantaneous, global availability, and the fate of companies depends upon the timely acquirement of information.

Lévy (1997) argued that never before has science and technology evolved so rapidly, changing modes of communication, relationships to time and space, and even daily life. This growth of technology, the geopolitical turbulence, and the randomness of markets are, according to Lévy (1997), destroying communities and forcing people to abandon their countries, customs, and language. This de-territorialization destroys social bonds and blurs identities, resulting in an immense need for community, bonds, recognition, and identity (Lévy, 1997). In that sense the de-territorialization will, in contrast, produce an industry for reconstructing the social bond, recasting identities for individuals and communities. “This vision of the future is organized around two complementary axes: The renewal of the social bound through people’s relationship to knowledge and collective intelligence itself” (Lévy, 1997, p. 11).

In this context, businesses will tend to organize themselves to be receptive to innovative networks with interactive systems operating across the enterprise. According to Lévy (1997), the ability to form and reform intelligent communities will be decisive to compete within a globalized economic space. And the constant redefinition of identities will no longer take place

within institutional frameworks of businesses, but through interactions in an international cyberspace.

According to Lévy (1997), the role of information technology and digital communication is to promote the construction of intelligent communities where anyone is able to share knowledge. The major project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be to “imagine, build, and enhance an interactive and ever changing cyberspace” (Lévy, 1997, p. 9). Communication technologies will help individuals to organize and navigate through knowledge on cyberspace, and think collectively.

O’Neill (2005) affirmed that the world is living a technological revolution in the electronic age. This revolution is leading to extreme changes where knowledge is the chief index of power, rather than territory, money, or natural resources. The value of labor is measured by education, and the success of nations depends on technology and highly qualified professionals. Media is delivering messages with such immediacy that people do not need leaders to inform them about what is happening in the world. According to O’Neill (2005), the same advantages that are brought from electronic media are also making it more difficult to deal with social and economic consequences, such as the population explosion, economic crises, and the big gap between poor and rich classes. Dery (2005) saw the electronic age as the appearance of a cybernetic culture that returns man to the preliterate worldview, more mythic than rational, tactile rather than visual, and integrated rather than atomized. The present can be characterized as McLuhan’s global village, where the world is a village not only because it enables interactivity among people around the world, but for the sense of involvement that flows from electronic interconnectedness. Dery (2005) affirmed that advertising was the lifeblood of television. However, today “...the viral infestation of international markets by McDonald’s, Coca-Cola,

Levi's, pop music, and Hollywood blockbusters are creating what Fortune has called a one-world pop-tech civilization" (Dery, 2005, p. 102). To Manovich (2009) in the electronic age the objects people consume are mass-produced goods that are the expressions of strategies of designers, producers, and marketers. People build their identities based on these available goods using customization and assembly. Because of that, strategies and tactics to sell products are now often closely linked in an interactive relationship (Manovich, 2009).

Barnes (2005) considered that the Internet is the main technology for the electronic age and saw the Internet as a mixture of orality and literacy because although messages online are written, most of the time they imitate the informality of the spoken word, incorporating oral features into the writing process. Barnes (2005) affirmed that the Internet can be seen as an antidote to mass media because anyone can create and distribute messages through this medium. Considering the current orality and literacy within society, Ong (2002) affirmed that today people are deeply involved with writing, but cannot see it as a technology, like print or computers, although writing has restructured consciousness. According to Ong (2002), the electronic age is the age of "secondary orality". This new orality resembles primary orality in the sense that it represents the present moment and generates a strong group sense, although this sense is immeasurably larger (Ong, 2002).

Littlejohn and Foss (2008) affirmed that cyberspace and the Internet are open, flexible and have a dynamic environment which leads people to engage in an interactive, community-based, and democratic world. The rise of the Internet with its related technologies, which are referred to as the "new media", created additional forms of reality that provide new ways to interact with a variety of types of information and bring the world back to more personal contact (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). People can talk back, have access to a larger amount and variety of

information, and communication can be personal, although it is via a computer, cell phone, iPod, or other electronic devices (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), the social integration that is brought by the second media age allows people to form communities for common interests and gives them a sense of belonging. Traditional media centralizes sources enabling the audience to identify with the situation that is produced and broadcast. While new media presents audiences with a shared ritual causing people to feel like they are part of something, instead of only communication observers who almost don't have a voice (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

The main difference between traditional media and new media is that the meaning of the term "interaction" has changed. It does not have to be a face-to-face interaction ritual. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), people do not interact so much with other people but with the medium itself. "We use media not so much to tell us about something else but because using media is a self-contained ritual that has meaning in and of itself" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 292). One might go on Twitter, read tweets, and post their thoughts every day not only because one wants to read what people are thinking or to express oneself, but because it is ritualized action through social media. Littlejohn and Foss (2008) affirmed that media are ritualized because they become habitual, formalized, and take on values that are larger than media usage itself. In that sense, we can imagine that Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and many other forms of social media are not only used to exchange information and express oneself, but also to make people feel that they are part of a community that they can identify with where they can hear, and be heard.

These definitions, characteristics, and insights about the second media age, cyberspace, and collective intelligence can relate to other insights regarding social media. And considering

that each medium is a reflection of the society in which it is developed and at the same time affects the evolution of humankind, especially its communication processes, it is important to now evaluate media developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how it is changing our society.

## **2.2 Social Media**

Since the 1960s, scientists and academics have been aware of the potential of computer-mediated communication; in the 1980s, digitized communication emerged with “global networks of university students and researchers, corporate networks, electronic mail, locally based „virtual communities’, and direct access to database information” as an economic and cultural phenomenon (Lévy, 1997, p. XX). By the end of that decade personal computers became more popular, and simultaneously, isolated networks were being interconnected and the Internet was developed as “the symbol of that heterogeneous and cross-border medium ... cyberspace” (Lévy, 1997, p. XX). In 1995, 9% of Americans were online (Steinberg & Light, 2008); by 2008, according to The Nielsen Company, 220 million Americans had Internet access at home and/or work. According to Li and Bernoff (2008), with the advance of technology and the Internet, a social trend has developed in which people use online tools to connect and share content with other people in their everyday lives. The explosion of user-created media content on the web has unleashed a new media universe called social media (Manovich, 2009).

For Safko and Brake (2009), this new media, developed with the advance of the Internet that allows conversations between people and brands online, is „social media’. According to Li and Bernoff (2008), this “social trend in which people use technologies to get things they need from each other; rather than from traditional institutions like corporations” (p. 9) has been noticed since the turn to the 21<sup>st</sup> century; they call it *groundswell* and affirm that it started with people using tools to linkup with each other in different ways. Napster is one example, which in

2000 initiated the possibility of music sharing. Although this dynamic is just over a decade old and still a new subject; a few authors have already developed consistent definitions of this trend and assessed its effects on society. Boyd, et al. (2010) affirmed that social media enables conversations to occur asynchronously and beyond geographic boundaries, but these conversations are bounded by a well-defined group of participants in a shared social context. This new type of media allows individuals and organizations to create and deliver information, in contrast to traditional media like television, radio, or newspapers, which use mass communication to disseminate information and to which audiences rarely respond directly. In addition, audiences typically do not make their own content in these traditional media.

Social media presented a new way for people to connect to each other and relate to companies, brands, and public figures. According to Li and Bernoff (2008), this trend is global and unstoppable, "...a spontaneous movement of people using online tools to connect, take charge of their own experience, and get what they need... from each other" (p. IX – X). This movement affects business and industry because the power has shifted to the public. Li and Bernoff (2008) affirmed that it is the collision of three trends: People, technology, and economics. "These three trends – people's desire to connect, new interactive technologies, and online economics – have created a new era... it's evolving rapidly – creating an incredible challenge for corporate strategies" (p. 11). For Li and Bernoff (2008), the spread of social technologies shifted the balance between institutions and people. In addition, these new technologies changed how people interact socially. The technology is now interactive, with people connecting through social networks. And the economics are now based on online traffic, which means money (Li & Bernoff, 2008). In 2007, the money spent on online advertising reached \$14.6 billion in the United States, because advertisers know that traffic indicates that

people are spending time online, and these professionals act to translate attention into advertising power (Li & Bernoff, 2008, p. 11). Advertisers are shifting their money online, the idea of news is changing, and branding strategies are including social media (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

Solis (2007) affirmed that social media caused a fundamental shift in culture that created a new landscape of influencers and a new ecosystem that supports the socialization of information and brings the possibility of conversations that, begun locally, may end up having a global impact. Individuals play an important role in not only disseminating information but also creating new content for other people to share, developing a new layer of influencers (Solis, 2007). To Manovich (2009) social media is not only a “scale[d]-up version of twentieth-century media culture” (p. 319), but by moving from media to social media a shift from Internet users accessing content produced by small number of professional producers to users accessing content produced by other nonprofessional users emerged. This does not mean that every user is a consumer of only amateur content, but that there is a shift in cultural consumption. According to Manovich (2009) this shift is referred as the *long-tail phenomenon*, meaning that most of the content online finds an audience.

Companies have to communicate effectively with audiences, and that starts with listening. “This is where the future of communication takes shape” (Solis, 2007, para. 17). The author suggests that sociology needs to be introduced to marketing strategies, because the technology and the tools will change, networks will evolve, but there is always going to be the need to stimulate conversations. Li and Bernoff (2008) also stated that technologies are powerful, but they view them as enablers of communication. “It is the technology in the hands of almost-always-connected people that makes it so powerful” (p. 11). In that sense, it is necessary to study the trend, regardless of whether technology continues to change, in order for users and

companies to be able to understand how to work effectively with social media. According to Li and Bernoff (2008), relationships are everything in the groundswell, and the way that people connect with each other determines how the power shifts and how companies should work with this new trend.

Safko and Brake (2009) believe that social media from a business perspective is a disruptive factor, just as railroads, telephones, and airplanes were when they first became available and people did not know how to use or take advantage of their benefits. According to Safko and Brake (2009), there are three main rules of social media for businesses: 1) Social media is about enabling conversations; 2) one cannot control conversations but can influence them; and 3) influence is the basis upon which all economically viable relationships are built on social media. Li and Bernoff (2008) also developed a strategy for brands and businesses to deal with social media. They call it the POST method, which is a systematic framework to assemble a plan to work with social media. POST stands for: People, Objective, Strategy and Technology. The first step of the method is People, considering what the audience is ready for and what is important to them. The second is Objective, underlying goals that the company wants to achieve. The third step is to develop a Strategy to achieve those goals, considering that talking to the audience through social technologies is different from traditional marketing. Technology involves choosing which technologies should be used to reach the goal.

Considering both perspectives of Safko and Brake (2009) and Li and Bernoff (2008), it is crucial for businesses to enter social media, but equally crucial that they first plan how to build a relationship with their customers and interact using the right tools. To Manovich (2009) business strategies went in a new direction in the 2000s. The development of web platforms and growing consumer economies in the previous decades led to the explosion of user-generated content



available in digital form. As a response to this explosion, companies created powerful platforms designed to host this content (Manovich, 2009). And those platforms are the social media tools.

### 2.2.1 Social Media Tools

Safko and Brake (2009) considered social media to be an ecosystem, similar to a biological ecosystem, which is an association of living organisms that interact with each other. A conversation is developed through social media tools (Manovich, 2009). “What was ephemeral, transient, unmappable, and invisible became permanent, mappable, and viewable” (Manovich, 2009, p. 324). Social media tools allow conversations to be distributed in space and time. People can respond to any conversation regardless of their location, and the conversation can go on forever.

Li and Bernoff (2008) developed a classification of technologies based on how people use those tools that is similar to the one later developed by Safko and Brake (2009). Safko and Brake (2009) presented a 15-category classification system for social media technologies. A comparison between both classifications is demonstrated by Table 1.

TABLE 1  
SOCIAL MEDIA TOOL CLASSIFICATIONS

Social media tools	Li and Bernoff classification	Safko and Brake classification	Characteristics	Examples
<b>Blogs</b>	People creating	Publish	Personal or group journal of entries (posts) containing writings, videos, and/or photos.	Blogger.com Tumblr.com
<b>Social networks</b>	People connecting	Social networking	Allows users to maintain profiles, connect, and interact with other users	Facebook Myspace Orkut
<b>Virtual worlds</b>	People connecting	Virtual worlds	Simulated environments where people can interact in virtual communities	Second Life Cyworld Wee-World
<b>Wikis / Open source</b>	People collaborating	Publish	Sites that have multiple contributors that create and maintain content	Wikipedia Linux

TABLE 1 (continued)

Social media tools	Li and Bernoff classification	Safko and Brake classification	Characteristics	Examples
<b>Forums</b>	People reacting to each other	Publish	Online forums where members can discuss a wide variety of subjects	Yahoo Forum AOL Forum
<b>Ratings and reviews</b>	People reacting to each other	Aggregators	Websites in which members can rate and review products and services	TripAdvisor Rotter Tomatoes Amazon.com
<b>Tags</b>	People organizing content	Aggregators	Organizes and classifies online content with marks called tags	Digg Del.icio.us
<b>RSS and widgets</b>	Accelerating consumption	RSS	Tools to deliver updates about content that is interesting to the user	RSS 2.0 FeedBurner Google gadgets
<b>Photo</b>	People organizing content	Photo sharing	Tools to share and archive photos online	Flickr Picasa
<b>Audio</b>	People creating	Audio	Download and upload music	iTunes BitTorrent Rhapsody
<b>Video</b>	People creating	Video	Websites to watch and share videos online	Youtube Hulu Vimeo
<b>Microblog</b>	People creating / People connecting	Microblogging	Tools used to communicate online through short messages	Twitter Plurk
<b>Livecasting</b>	People creating	Livecasting	Emcompasses Internet radio and allows users to stream a live broadcast	Justin.tv BlogTalkRadio
<b>Games</b>	Not mentioned	Gaming	Tools used to play games with an online community	Halo3 World of Warcraft
<b>Applications</b>	Not mentioned	Productivity Applications	Refers to business applications	Google Docs and Alerts BitTorrent
<b>Search</b>	Not mentioned	Search Tools	Search engines used to locate a variety of content in the Internet	Google.com Bing.com Yahoo Search

Note: Table organized according to Li and Bernoff (2008) and Safko and Brake (2009).

It is important to understand the nature of the relationships built on social media, and not only the practical aspects of each technology. But in order to develop an understanding of social media, the relationships that occur within them, and the conversations that are facilitated by them are appropriate for analysis. Twitter will be the tool used to collect the data for this project.

### 2.2.2 Twitter

Twitter is a social media tool that allows users to post and read messages called *tweets* that have 140 characters or less. “Twitter is a real-time information network that connects [users] to the latest information” (Twitter.com, 2011, para. 3). Twitter is easy to engage. Users access the website twitter.com to sign up and create a profile that may include a short description, a picture, some personal information, and a Twitter username. It requires low bandwidth, is predominantly text-based; there is no charge to join and no software to install (Ballard-Reisch et al., 2011).

After joining, the user can decide to “follow” other users to be able to read their tweets. “One can only see messages from people one chooses to follow. Following someone requires clicking the appropriate icon unless users have locked access, which means they must approve those who request to follow them” (Ballard-Reisch et al., 2011, p. 58). Twitter’s central feature is a stream of tweets posted by people that the user follows, appearing in reverse chronological order (Boyd et al., 2010). Twitter users, also called *twitterers* or *tweeters* (Ballard-Reisch et al., 2011), can make their tweet stream public to any user or protected to only users that are approved to follow them. “On Twitter, anyone can read, write and share messages of up to 140 characters. These messages, or Tweets, are public and available to anyone interested in them. Twitter users subscribe to your messages by following your account. Followers receive every one of your messages in their timeline, a feed of all the accounts they have subscribed to” (Twitter.com, 2011, para 3).

People use Twitter not only to share short messages, but also to share links to other websites, pictures, videos, and other Internet content (Safko & Brake, 2009). Twitter can be accessed directly through the website, through a mobile phone by sending SMS updates (Java et

al., 2007) or through applications that are available ranging from mobile to desktop tools (Boyd et al., 2010) such as TweetDeck.

Twitter was launched in March 2006 as a research and development tool within the San Francisco Company, *Obvious*, for internal employee communication. It was originally designed to be shared via SMS, but seven months later Twitter was launched to the public and extended to the Web (Boyd et al., 2010). Jack Dorsey is the cofounder and chief CEO of Twitter; Evan Williams and Biz Stone, the other cofounders, are chief product officer and director of community, respectively. Twitter is used by people all over the world and is available in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish (Twitter.com, 2011). In April 2007, a year after being launched, Twitter had 94,000 users (Java et al., 2007), but according to Ballard-Reisch et al. (2011), Twitter became more popular in 2009 and it was featured on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Time* magazine. According to its website, today Twitter has 175 million registered users (Twitter.com, 2011) and 140 million tweets are written per day (Twitter Blog, 2011). Twitter is used by 17 million Americans (Webster, 2010) and 8 per cent of the American adults that use the Internet are Twitter users (Pew Internet, 2010). Twitter usage is an online activity that is particularly popular with young adults (18-29 years old), minorities (African Americans, and Latinos), and those who live in cities (Pew Internet, 2010).

Tweeters use Twitter to post opinions, actions, thoughts, links, suggestions, but also to develop conversations among users. Each tweet provides additional information, deeper context, and embedded media (Twitter.com, 2011). According to Ballard-Reisch et al. (2011), tweets range from information sharing, updates, URL's, and news reporting to interpersonal messages. "Twitter is a predominantly open-ended forum where the activity is primarily social, but a significant portion is also commercial or news-based" (Ballard-Reisch et al., 2011). Considering

Twitter usage, Java et al. (2007) conducted a study that discovered that users utilize Twitter: For daily chatter; to have conversations; to share information; and to report news. Based on their research results, Java et al. (2007) concluded that there are three categories of Twitter users: Information sources; friends; and information seekers.

Twitter users can publicly post direct and indirect messages (Huberman, Romero and Wu, 2008). Indirect updates are posted when the message is meant for anyone that cares to read it. According to Boyd et al. (2010), there are three types of public directed messages that can be sent on Twitter: Using the @user syntax, using #hashtags, and retweets. The first type uses the “@user” syntax to refer to other users and address messages to them directly (Boyd et al., 2010). Twitter.com names this conversation as *mentions* and affirms that users can mention an account in their tweets by preceding it with the @ symbol.

The other public direct conversation is the usage of hashtags (#'s) to mark topics in a tweet so other users may search to follow conversations about a topic (Boyd et al., 2010). For example, if a user wants to ask the Kansas Humane Society about adopting a pet, this person can post a tweet such as: @KSHumaneSociety How can I adopt a puppy? #adopt. The person monitoring the Kansas Humane Society twitter feed would see this tweet as would other users who search for adoption topics using the hashtag #adopt. All tweets that appear in this stream will not likely deal with adopting pets at the Kansas Humane Society, though, but could also include tweets about adopting a child, an exercise plan, a healthy eating habit, etc. The hashtag also serves to identify trends that are being discussed on Twitter (Boyd et al., 2010). According to Twitter.com (2011), users use # to words in their tweets to categorize them for others as if it was the theme of that specific tweet. Users can then click on a hashtag to see other similarly-themed tweets.

A third type of public directed message is called a *retweet* which “is the Twitter-equivalent of email forwarding where users post messages originally posted by others” (Boyd et al., 2010, p. 1). On Twitter.com and some platforms, a retweet can be identified by the syntax “RT” followed by the user’s name that originated the message, and finally the original message. For example, if someone retweets news from *The Wichita Eagle*, the tweet could be: RT @kansasdotcom Armed robbery reported Mulvane State Bank, 4641 E. Douglas. Two suspects, dispatchers say. <http://bit.ly/fVImHV>. Every time someone retweets a user’s message, it appears in her/his tweet stream. Users retweet for different reasons and may or may not add more content in the retweeted message (Boyd et al., 2010). According to Wasserman (2009), the action of retweeting has been an option for tweets since the development of Twitter. However, by the end of 2009, with the launch of the new retweet button, Twitter also made it possible to retweet articles, blog posts, and websites. The main benefit of retweeting is that a message can reach new audiences.

According to Ballard-Reisch et al. (2011) all Twitter communication is open and may be observed by followers, except messages that are called *DM* for direct messages; DMs are closed messages exchanged between two users. DMs can only be seen by the two users in the conversation. This feature is almost like an e-mail service inside Twitter, but the user can only send 140 characters per message. According to Twitter.com (2011), a direct message is used to privately tweet to a particular user that follows you and is used by starting the tweet with DM or D, followed by the user’s name and the message. Other features presented by Twitter are a search engine for topics or users and the possibility to create lists and organize who one follows based on categories that are chosen by the user. Most Twitter platforms also include information

on how many people a user follows, how many people follow the user, if the user is listed in someone's list, and the number of tweets a user has posted.

Boyd et al. (2010) and Jansen et al. (2009) classified Twitter as an example of microblogging, a technology that allows any person to share messages, audio, video and also read posts from other people, but with a limited amount of characters. For Java et al. (2007), microblogging is a new form of communication in which users post short messages describing their current status or sharing a thought. Users can distribute these posts by instant messages, mobile phones, email, or the Web. According to Safko and Brake (2009) microblogging began with the advent of the web log or blog, and after some time bloggers started to share more condensed and personal posts, what was termed a *microblog*. For Java et al. (2007), the main difference between microblogging and blogging is that the first fulfills a need for a faster mode of communication, encouraging shorter posts that require less thought, investment and time, resulting in a higher frequency of publication. "On average, a prolific blogger may update her blog once every few days; on the other hand a microblogger may post several updates in a single day" (Java et al., 2007, p. 2).

Huberman et al. (2008) considered Twitter a social network that mediates interactions among people. "Twitter.com is an online social network used by millions of people around the world to stay connected to their friends, family members, co-workers through their computers and mobile phones" (Huberman et al., 2008, p. 2). As a social network, Twitter will not only continue to grow, but it will become the future of marketing (Morrissey, 2010). Boyd et al. (2010) affirmed that Twitter users use this social network to converse with other individuals, groups, and an entire public. Research studies by Webster (2010), Huberman et al. (2010), and

Nielsen Company (2010) were also conducted based on the idea of Twitter being a social network, along with Facebook and MySpace.

Li and Bernoff (2008) considered that Twitter does not present a new medium, but it combines texting and blogging, permitting people to “broadcast and subscribe to a constant stream of content” (p. 36). Because the groundswell is constantly evolving, Twitter is characterized by some as microblogging, and by others, as a social network. But for Li and Bernoff (2008), the emphasis is on the relationships that the tool creates, and not on the technology itself; Twitter has a place among different classifications of technologies. Boyd et al. (2010) affirmed that Twitter combines elements of social networks and blogs.

The discussion about social network, microblogging, and Twitter definitions and classifications is still in progress, but one can't deny that Twitter is growing and becoming increasingly popular in the United States. Since 2008, there has been explosive growth in social network usage. According to Webster (2010), 24% of Americans had a personal page on a social network like Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter in 2008, but by 2010, this number grew to 48%. According to the same research, Twitter awareness went from 5% in 2008 to 87% in 2010 because of the constant appearance of Twitter in other traditional media like TV, radio, and print. The majority of monthly Twitter users (users that utilize Twitter at least once a month) in 2010 were well educated and more likely to live in higher income households (Webster, 2010). Regarding Twitter access, 85% of users access the Internet from two or more different locations, and 63% of monthly users access social networks via a mobile phone. Webster (2010) also advanced that regular Twitter users are more frequent users of other social networks, are more likely to update their status several times a day, and also update status through a mobile phone.



Thus, Twitter is a social network very connected to other tools, and users' behavior on Twitter is associated with their behavior in other social networks (Webster, 2010).

According to Huberman et al. (2008), Twitter users do not actually interact with every user that they follow, and there are two different networks, a dense one that consists of followers and followed, and a sparser network of users who are interactive with each other. According to Webster (2010), 70% of users passively follow others, read tweets and retweet, but do not contribute new content. Twitter.com (2011) affirmed that users "can contribute, or just listen in and retrieve "up to the second" information. Some people never tweet, they simply use Twitter as a way to get the latest information on their interests" (para. 6).

Even though many tweeters are passive users, Twitter is also a tool for businesses to connect to their target audiences. According to Webster (2010), the number of Twitter users that follow brands is three times higher than users of other social networks. In addition, Twitter is a "companion medium" to other media channels, especially television (Webster, 2010). The regular users of Twitter are people who are constantly connected to the Internet through computers, mobile phones, and other technologies, and that constantly update different social networks. Seventy-three percent of Twitter users consider the Internet the most important medium in their lives, followed by TV, radio, and newspapers; 46% of them turn first to the Internet to learn about a breaking news story (Webster, 2010, p. 41-44). For Twitter.com (2011):

Twitter connects businesses to customers in real-time. Businesses use Twitter to quickly share information with people interested in their products and services, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and influential people. From brand lift, to CRM, to direct sales, Twitter offers businesses a chance to reach an engaged audience. (para. 8)

The popularity of Twitter can be attributed to the ease of creating a short message and posting it, easier than regular longer posts on blogs. It is also easier to read short messages from

different twitterers than longer posts from different bloggers. Because of this ease of use, Twitter also carries value through immediacy and portability. “Since microblogging requires much less effort than conventional blogging, many people find it more entertaining. You simply send out a Tweet whenever you have a moment; there is much less pressure to regularly update your thoughts” (Safko & Brake, 2009, p. 266). Because of that, many people use Twitter to supplement their main blogs, posting short descriptions of their posts and driving traffic to their main blog or website. Commenting and retweeting is also an easier and faster way to entertain and exchange conversations (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Although Twitter users can decide to follow or not other users, Safko and Brake (2009) considered Twitter the primary way that thought leaders in Generation Y and Millennials and technology users keep in touch with each other. Because of this, companies are adopting Twitter as a part of their marketing, public relations, communications, and customer services approaches (Safko & Brake, 2009). This action can be seen in many companies including Southwest Airlines, *The New York Times*, NASA, and even U.S. President Barack Obama. According to Huberman et al. (2008), scholars, advertisers, and political activists see social networks like Twitter as a tool for the propagation of ideas, the formation of social bonds, and viral marketing. Because microblogging can be done from computers, smart phones, tablets, and other tools, businesses are presented with different ways to communicate with their customers, with more interactivity and the possibility to engage in conversations with target audiences.

According to Webster (2010), Twitter users frequently exchange information about products and services to learn more about them, to provide opinions, ask for opinions, and look for sales. Twitterers are also more likely to follow brands or/and companies than social networkers (users of social networks) in general. And going against what the majority of social

media gurus think, the research showed that if Twitter incorporated targeted advertising into its service, the usage of the majority of users would not be affected (Webster, 2010).

Twitter users are seen as leaders in social media (Webster, 2010). In that sense, brands and companies are trying to build conversations with Twitter users and establish good images, because they've learned that a bad image can be spread easily through Twitter. Jansen et al. (2009) conducted research on the power of word-of-mouth on Twitter and discovered that in 14,200 random tweets, 2,700 (19%) mentioned some brand or product, indicating that Twitter is a powerful tool for viral marketing campaigns, to build customer relationships, and to influence word-of-mouth and branding efforts. Twitter is a venue for identifying what costumers feel about a brand, and at the same time it is a platform to connect directly with customers to build and enhance relationships.

According to Jansen et al. (2009) Twitter is a potentially rich avenue for companies to explore as part of their branding strategies. "Customer brand perceptions and purchasing decisions appear increasingly influenced by Web communications and social networking services, as consumers increasingly use these communication technologies for trusted sources of information, insights, and opinions" (Jansen et al., 2009, p. 18). In that sense, it is important to understand branding strategies and theory, in order to understand how these strategies are adapting to the new opportunities presented by Twitter to build brand relationships with target audiences.

### **2.3 Branding**

In order to understand branding strategies, a literature review about branding is presented considering definitions of brand, brand equity, identity, and branding. Two lines of thought about branding are also presented. The first one, branding and the corporate identity, is presented by

Kotler and Keller (2006), Tavares (1998), and Pinho (2007). The second perspective, branding and organizational identity, will be based on Hatch and Schultz (2002) and Hall and Gay (2003). These lines of thought and definitions are then connected to branding on social media and Twitter. The data collected on this research are analyzed by the two lines of thought to check which is being applied on Twitter and to generate knowledge about branding strategies on Twitter.

### **2.3.1 Brand**

According to Kotler (1996), brand is a name, term, signal, symbol, or a combination of these, used for the purpose of identifying products or services of a seller or a group of sellers and differentiating them from the competition. Brands were first developed in art to differentiate art pieces and assure creators' rights (Nemer, 1993). After the decline of the Roman Empire nations no longer realized commercial transactions, and the development of cities brought the development of commercial centers and the first stores. Associations were developed to assure the quality of products, and these associations determined that every producer of goods had to stamp brands on their products to identify them. According to Nemer (1993), since then brands have been used to identify the origins of a product. Nemer (1993) also affirmed that the modern brands, as we know them today, started after the Industrial Revolution, when different techniques of sales and promotion determined the importance of renamed brands. The first modern brands intended to differentiate one product from others that were very similar, becoming one of the most important tools for marketing. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, companies started to produce in large quantities and to use media that could reach large geographic areas; this brought a revolution in branding, stimulating companies to develop brands that were memorable, with easy pronunciation, original, and that represented their products (Nemer, 1993). This is still the way

brands are developed today. By 1890, most industrialized countries had brand laws to protect companies and also consumers. Today new brands are constantly developed to try to reach every niche of the globalized market (Nemer, 1993).

Kotler and Keller (2006) stated that brands identify the background of a product, as information about the producer and distributor, and allow consumers to know who has responsibility for that product or service. Consumers, being individuals or other organizations, are able to evaluate a product in different ways, depending on how the brand is established. This evaluation is built upon the experience that the consumer has with the product or service, and also upon the marketing strategies that are used by the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Brands can communicate quality, and if consumers have a good experience with a product, they may choose that particular brand again. The fidelity that is built between a brand and consumers offers more predictability around product demand, and it may help build barriers to other companies entering a market (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Tavares (1998) advanced the concept of a brand as more than simply a name or a symbol: It is the result of research, innovation, communication, and other characteristics that will become attached to a brand during its development. Although a brand is very connected to a product, both are different, because the brand is responsible for establishing the relationship between consumers and companies. According to Tavares (1998), a company produces the product, but what the customer buys is the brand that gives meaning to the product.

Kotler and Keller (2006) also affirmed that a brand is used to differentiate a company's products and services from similar ones. This differentiation can be functional, rational, and tangible, or symbolic, emotional, and intangible. In this context, Kotler and Keller (2006) presented the definition of brand equity, as the added value endowed on products and services

that can be reflected in the way consumers think, feel, and act in respect to the brand. To Kotler and Keller (2006), brand equity represents psychological and financial value to the brand. Aaker (1996) also asserted that brand equity is the set of assets that is linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds or subtracts from the value that the product or service has for customers. The categories for this asset are brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. Aaker (1996) concluded that a powerful brand has a high level of brand equity, that it is always positively related to the values of the categories that build the brand. Brand equity benefits the company through a set of assets that consider consumer fidelity and higher perception of the quality of the product; it also facilitates the brand to launch other products or new brands. This set of assets can add or subtract value to the brand because it helps consumers to process the large amount of information about products and brands that is available, but it can also affect consumer trust during the process of decision making (Aaker, 1991). In that sense, if the set of assets is well developed with strong values, it will raise consumers' satisfaction. In order to not depreciate brand equity, a company needs to constantly work on the value of the brand, its quality, and functionality, as well as on the positive associations with the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This process can be facilitated by investing in research, advertising, and high quality customer service.

### **2.3.2 Branding and its two lines of thought**

The first concept of branding appeared more than five thousand years ago, and its literal meaning is „to stamp with hot irons' (Schultz, 2005). It originally referred to the branding irons that were used to stamp animals like cattle and slaves in the Middle Ages. According to Schultz (2005), branding is the relationship between the origins and daily practices of an organization (organizational culture), what the organization desires to achieve, and how the organization is

seen by its stakeholders (image), everything aligned to the perception of what the organization really is (identity). It is a complex process, but its objective is simple: Create, develop, and maintain an identity for an organization. Today branding is a philosophy of managing companies' identities and images that has the goal of increasing its attractiveness to desired publics, drawing more business and achieving a favorable market differential. An organization in this context can be a company, a group of people, or even an individual. The objective of branding is to present the best qualities of the organization to the stakeholders (Schultz, 2005).

Branding, according to Schultz (2005), can be understood through two different trends of thought. The first one, which dominated the discipline for a long time, is called corporate identity (Kotler & Keller, 2006). It views brand management development as occurring through the product and marketing. This model focuses on the creation of a positioning strategy in the market for the products and services of the organization, considering the identity inherent to the brand. It does not consider the creation of meaning through the organization's culture. The second trend emphasizes organizational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002), which focuses on the process of creating meaning for the organization and establishing a common sense of perception between the organization and its stakeholders.

Both perspectives have different definitions for such terms as identity and image. While the corporate identity is oriented by the organizations' leaders and appeals for visual aspects, the organizational identity concentrates on social processes that happen between all the members of the organization and the meanings that are built through social interactions between the organization and its publics. The characteristics of each perspective will be further discussed below.

### **2.3.2.1 Branding and corporate identity**

The identity of an organization in this first model is generated by planning and communicating the brand to the public. The identity is what defines the organization's position in the market. Simonson and Schmitt (2002) stated that the values and aspects that constitute the brand are decided and planned by the leaders of the company. The main issue of managing the identity in this case is to create a corporate esthetic that reflects the personality of the organization through attractive elements. The brand is the main form of transmitting the values that the organization wants to pass to its publics. The brands are strategically planned and managed to be unique in the mind of an organization's clients.

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), branding creates mental structures with the purpose of making the consumer organize his/her knowledge about products and services, making decisions and generating value to the organization. To have successful branding strategies and generate brand value, consumers have to be convinced that there is a difference between brands that are in the same category of product or service.

Brand and product are different. A brand sells sensations, ideas, and images to the customer. It has different elements in its composition, and according to Kotler and Keller (2006), these elements have to be easily recognized and memorable. The elements also have to be descriptive and persuasive, to enhance comprehension of the brand, especially when customers don't analyze information before making decisions. The more concrete the benefits of the brand are, the more important the brand elements are to communicating its intangible characteristics. To plan a branding strategy, it is necessary to determine the nature of the elements of the brand. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), the most powerful brand element is the slogan, which



works as a connector to help the customer understand what the brand is and what makes it special.

The identity is considered the way an organization wants to be seen, while the image represents the way the public really sees the organization. Image is defined as the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that a person or group has of an object. These impressions can be real or imaginary, true or false. The image is connected to the product, to the brand, and to the organization (Tavares, 1998). Since an organization has a lot of different publics (customers, employees, suppliers, community, government, and others), an organization never has only one image. The image can emerge from the way the organization establishes its strategies and its politics related to products, price, distribution and promotion, the impressions left from sellers, employees, appearance of the physical location of the organization, the consequences of relationships with different publics including the press, opinion leaders, suppliers, etc; or the actions developed in the business department. Images are always changing because they are more oriented by appearances than facts (Tavares, 1998).

Marketing and advertising have multiple strategies to influence the image of a brand in the eyes of the public. Organizations have to gain credibility by communicating to publics why their brands are superior. Advertising is the main way of communicating organizational identity because it allows more control of the message and it has great power of persuasion. Advertising constructs the messages about the brand on three levels (Pinho, 2007): Recognition; spontaneous reminder; and top of mind. The objective of advertising is to make a brand familiar to customers, build an organization's reputation and construct a relationship between the organization and consumers, as most consumer decisions are made with previous knowledge about the brand (Pinho, 2007).

Media is the main method of disseminating an organization's reputation (Almeida, 2005). A strong reputation is built with different actions that add value for the stakeholders. Almeida (2005) asserted that reputation includes the identity (self) and the image (others), resulting in the feedback that the organization needs. Reputation is built according to interpretations of the identity of an organization, which are constructed by the organization's reputation, resulting in a cycle. To construct a good reputation it is necessary to communicate a solid and strong identity, through the media.

In other words, the image is the way the public sees the organization, originating from the identity that the organization communicates. This identity is composed of the values established and managed by the upper management of the organization, and communicated to the public through media (Tavares, 1998). Identity is stable and durable, constructing the essence of the brand and generating the image, which is the reflection of the identity that is communicated. Reputation results from the consistence of this image (Tavares, 1998).

This perspective is strongly associated with graphic design, esthetic, and visual values used to communicate the values of the organization that are defined by its leaders. The identity is seen as the organization's position in the market and how it is communicated. The brand is seen as a linear channel that has a group of organizational messages directed to a specific public with a planned effect on this public, always considering the noise that can happen during the communication process. Figure 2 illustrates this model of branding.

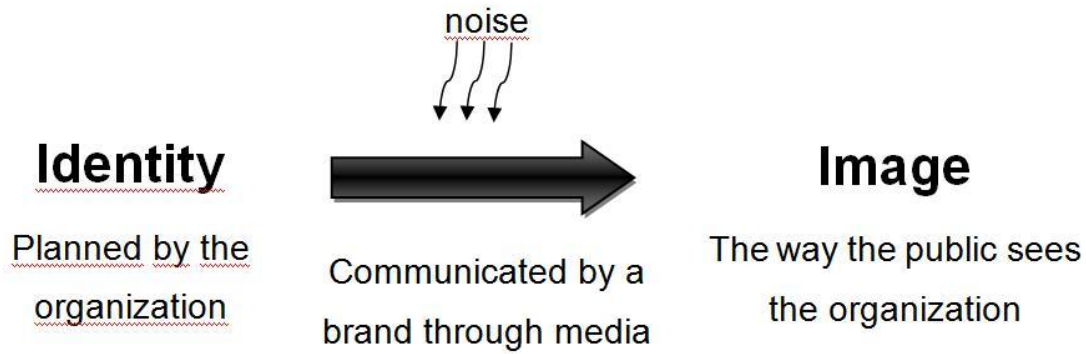


Figure 2. Corporate identity dynamics model based in Kotler & Keller, 2006, Pinho, 2007, Tavares, 1998.

According to Schultz (2005) the costs to develop and maintain brands for individual products are very high, especially those that have an international component. The author stated that this is the main reason for the change to the second trend of branding that does not focus on the product anymore, but on the organization and its relationships.

### 2.3.2.2 Branding and organizational identity

According to Hatch and Schultz (2002) an organization's internal data are more exposed nowadays because the organizational culture is more open and available to anyone interested in the company. At the same time employees hear more opinions from outside people about the company. Considering this scenario Hatch and Schultz (2002) developed a theoretical model that considers that organizational identity expresses the culture of the organization, while the culture reflects the identity. The identity reflects the image and leaves impressions on stakeholders. To represent this model they developed this chart:

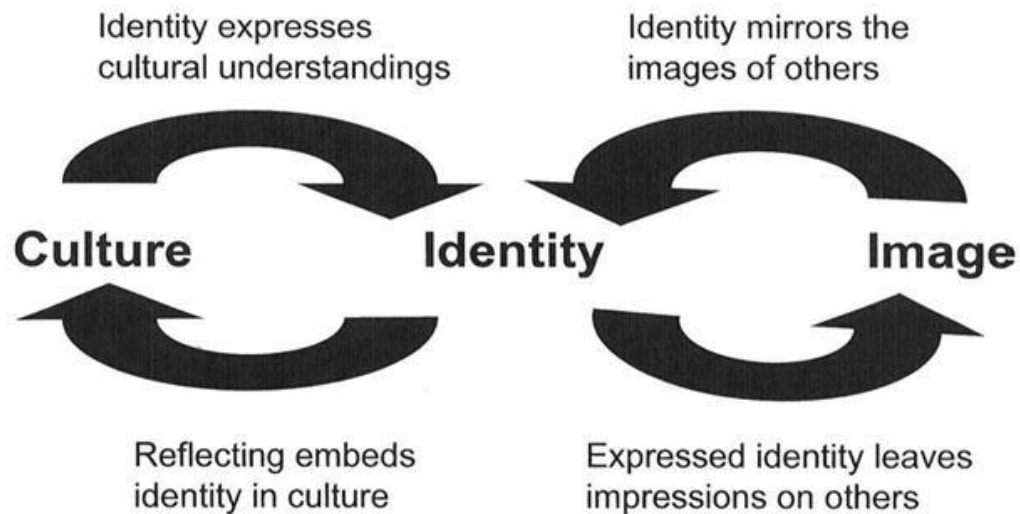


Figure 3. The organizational identity dynamics model (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

In this perspective, identity is not an essence built from a company's leaders, but a process that is constantly built, changing according to each situation or necessity. It is a flow process because the organizational identity is built by the social processes of the organization, but especially by the values and meanings that are developed during the social interaction of the organization with its clients, suppliers, employees, press, opinion leaders, and others. It is a process that is constantly evolving because the values, beliefs, and rules of the organization are constantly built by the publics' perception of the organization. The interpretation of the organization's values is also constantly changing according to the historical, economical and political context.

Kellner (2001) insisted that in the contemporary world organizational identity is seen as multiple, constantly changing, personal, and inserted in a social atmosphere, always related to someone else. Hall and Gay (2003) also said that since the modern world that came with industrialization and electric media, TV, radio, and telephone, etc., identities started to be noticed as dependent on factors outside of themselves to actually exist. Identities are marked by the

differences between similar identities, and built in a social context outside of the company. The post-modern world is the transition from a functional approach, where identity was seen as stable, and solid, to a processual approach, in which identity is seen as capable of change and built within a social context (Hall & Gay, 2003).

### **2.3.3 Branding and Twitter**

Branding in social media is very different from branding in traditional media. In social media, users are more active and produce their own content. If consumers do not like a product or service, they will not hesitate to communicate it through Twitter, blog, or any other social media. At the same time, branding strategies and advertisements on social media can be avoided more easily than in traditional media, by skipping it, closing the browser, or many other options. Because so much of the control is in the hands of receivers of messages, strategies for social media have to be more interesting, more personalized to each customer, and more appealing to make the user want to read it, watch it, or listen to it (Li & Bernoff, 2008). Liu and Gal (2011) found in their study that companies that ask consumers to give advice, opinions and expectations enhance relationship closeness and propensity to transact with the organization. The rise of social media provides opportunities for organizations to interact with customers and solicit this input.

Li and Bernoff (2008) stated that before social media, customers had an idea of what a brand meant based on the image that was projected. But now customers talk to each other and redefine for themselves brands on which companies spend a lot of money to create a desired image. Social media presents to customers infinite options. People buy online, buy from each other, search online for services and prices, write reviews, read reviews, and blog. “Offline, people don’t change behaviors quickly, so companies can develop loyal customers. Online, people can switch behaviors as soon as they see something better” (Li & Bernoff, 2008, p. 11).

According to Dizard (2000) digital media divide the public of the mass media into numerous different publics. The construction of personal nets through digital tools is a reality and is changing information gathering habits of millions of people. In 2010, companies recognized that Twitter and social networks are a new trend that is going to keep growing and will be the future of marketing (Webster, 2010). Because of this recognition, strategies are being developed to advertise on social media.

Specifically on Twitter, “advertisers are using it as a default content-syndication channel, pop culture icon, and real-time content source” (Morrissey, 2010, p. 1). Because of Twitter’s open interface, brands use it to lead audiences to campaigns, rather than have a stand-alone Twitter strategy. For example, Twitter may be used to lead an audience to the company’s website, to a commercial on YouTube, or other types of interactions. Companies are developing social brands and using Twitter as a part of their marketing strategies that enables the power of word-by-mouth. Twitter is not only about people sharing personal actions or thoughts. According to Morrissey (2010), it evolved to a real-time source of consumer-consumer recommendations, and for brands that means that Twitter is a key content-sharing option. This shift can be illustrated by the fact that Twitter’s prompt changed from “What are you doing?” when it was created to “What’s happening?” in the end of 2009. These changes were made by users and brands on Twitter and social media together, one affecting the other. Company recognition of these changes will provide an opportunity for companies to develop a unique, dynamic connection between brand and potential customers (Morrissey, 2010).

Because Twitter users are also present in other social networks, being present on Twitter can lead to conversations about the brand in other social networks, and increase the “word-of-mouth” effect. Jansen et al. (2009) conducted research to analyze branding comments and

sentiments from microblogging users and investigated 12 brands in different industries including Starbucks, Dell, and Oral-B. The researchers discovered that people have opinions about brands and express them, no matter if their opinions are positive or negative. Consequently, in response to the growth and popularity of microblogging, more companies are providing users with a place to interact and exchange opinions. Nineteen percent of tweets mention an organization or brand, meaning that Twitter is viable for viral marketing campaigns, and 20% of the comments about an organization or brand actually provided sentiment or opinion about the company, showing that microblogging can affect brand awareness and brand image (Jansen et al., 2009).

Safko and Brake (2009) also considered that advertising and marketing on Twitter must adapt to the 140 characters of the tweet, calling it “micro-spam” and “micro-advertising”. But marketing strategies used on Twitter have the challenge to be different because it is not a traditional medium. Social media enables the audience to have a more active voice and answer to marketing and branding strategies developed by companies. Interactions can be developed and organizations can also gather information more easily about their publics. According to Thureau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensle, Lobschat, and Skiera (2010), this new model provides new opportunities but also makes traditional strategies useless. New media is digital, pro-active, visible, in real-time, ubiquitous, and based on networks. This new framework shows a shift in branding strategies because customers are now highly connected to the brand as an active partner that is also connected to a network of other customers (Thureau et al., 2010).

To improve the usage quality of Twitter, websites and technologies have been created around it. Brand effectiveness can be measured on Twitter by the number of retweets and mentions that a brand has from users. Applications were created to specifically measure retweets, mentions, and its effects. One of these applications is Retweetist (<http://retweetist.com/>), a

community that showcases the most retweeted messages, users, URLs, and users that retweet more often (Solis, 2008). There is also the Tweetrank tool ([www.tweetrank.com](http://www.tweetrank.com)) that measures the retweet reach and frequency of any user and ranks the results. It benefits marketers in the sense that these tools analyze whether their strategies are working and if they have a high retweet reach. According to Wasserman (2009), TweetMeme (<http://tweetmeme.com/>) is another application that allows marketers to add a retweet button on their online ads. Other websites such as Twitalyzer (<http://www.twitalyzer.com/>), Twinfluence (<http://www.twinfluence.com/>), and Twitter Grader (<http://twittergrader.com/>) can measure the relevance of a brand's tweets or its ranking compared to other brands (*Twitter success*, 2009). These tools are the new market researchers that evaluate if branding strategies are working or not. Social media brought changes in how to develop and maintain brand, but it also changed the way to measure effectiveness and to read audience satisfaction.

Based on this literature review of media theory, social media, and branding, this study will now collect actual data from companies on Twitter and analyze it with the lenses of these definitions and theories that were discussed.

## **2.4 Rationale**

The literature review identified definitions of important terms as media, social media, brand, branding, etc., and presented relevant prior research and theories about media and branding. Prior research focused on social media usage by individuals, the impact of social media on relationships between individuals, marketing strategies for companies to approach target audiences on social media, and proved that social media, including Twitter, is an important tool for companies to engage in conversations with their publics. Companies that historically based their branding campaigns on traditional media (television, newspaper, radio, etc.) have the



opportunity to engage to a form of communication through social media. It is necessary to understand how these companies approach their target audiences through social media, and what, if any, changes have been made in their branding strategies due to the emergence of new social media tools like Twitter. Grounded in literature and theory, the following research questions will be answered in this study:

RQ1: What is the nature of the relationships between brands and the public on Twitter?

RQ2: How are news media companies which historically use traditional media (newspaper, radio, television, etc.) for branding, using social media to create relationships with their consumers?

Based on the literature review some hypothesis can be predicted by previous research and theories. This project will also attempt to support these hypotheses:

H1: The majority of the tweets posted by the companies analyzed will contain links to other websites with more detailed content.

H2: News media companies that are present on Twitter tend to use an organizational identity strategy for branding more often than a corporate identity strategy to relate to their target audiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample

The literature review connected traditional media theory to premises and studies of social media. To explore the relationship between traditional media and social media use and strategies, six traditional news media companies, three newspaper, television and radio outlets, which are also active on Twitter will be analyzed. Companies represent one national news media outlet and one Wichita area outlet in each category. The criteria used to select companies for analysis included their recognized success in the field and their active engagement on Twitter. The companies had to tweet on a daily basis and be followed by at least 50,000 users, for national companies, and 1,000 users for local companies. To apply these criteria, the three top companies in each category were selected based on TV ratings, newspaper circulation, and radio ratings. They were then analyzed in terms of their presence online (website traffic) and presence on Twitter.

Newspaper sales declined 8.7% in 2010 and have been declining since 2007 because of the immediacy of Internet news and the recession (Plambeck, 2010). During this time period, many newspaper companies have developed an online presence. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, the three newspapers with the highest average daily circulation rate in 2010 were *The Wall Street Journal* (2,061,142), *USA Today* (1,830,594), and *The New York Times* (876,638). The top three newspapers in terms of circulation were also the ones that had the most website traffic, determined by the number of unique visitors in 2010: First, *USA Today* (239,425,560); second, *The New York Times* (217,513,400); and in third place, *The Wall Street*

*Journal* (122,397,004) (Porter, 2010). In terms of Twitter presence, *The New York Times* was the first newspaper to join Twitter, in March 2007, and has the largest number of Twitter followers (more than 2.6 million followers in March 2011). *The Wall Street Journal* came in second place with more than 464,000 followers, and *USA Today* ranked fifth with more than 73,000 Twitter followers (Porter, 2010). *The New York Times* is also very active on Twitter, posting new tweets almost hourly. Because of its high circulation, website traffic, and active presence on Twitter, *The New York Times* account on twitter, @nytimes, was chosen for study. *The Wichita Eagle* account on Twitter (@kansasdotcom) was chosen to represent local newspapers for three reasons: (1) it was the only newspaper from the Wichita area mentioned on the Audit Bureau of Circulations (daily circulation average of 70,300); (2) it had website traffic of 277,359 unique visitors in January of 2011 (Compete, 2011); and (3) it has an active Twitter account that posts new content almost every couple of hours and has more than 3,000 followers.

Television news has also been affected by online news, but Americans still rely on television stations because they find them more credible (Mehrabi, Hassan, & Ali, 2009). According to Nielsen (2011), the top three cable news channels by ratings in 2010 were FNC (Fox News), CNN, and MSNBC. CNN had the larger coverage of households in America (100.88 million) (Nielsen, 2011). CNN website traffic was 25,006,285 unique visitors in January 2011, compared to only 3,239,674 unique visitors for Fox news, and 1,807, 419 for MSNBC (Compete, 2011). The CNN account on Twitter @CNN also has more followers (more than 1,675,000 in March 2011) and posts new tweets, almost hourly. Because of these criteria, CNN (@CNN) was chosen for study. According to SHG Resources (2011), there are five television stations in Wichita: KAKE, KWCH, KCTU, KSNW, and KPTS. Among those companies, KAKE-TV was the number one in website traffic, with 176,620 unique visitors in January, 2011

(Compete, 2011). It is also the most active on Twitter, posting new messages every couple of hours and has more than 3,800 followers as of March, 2011. Its account on Twitter, @KAKENews, was chosen to be the local television station to be studied for this project.

Radio, one of the first electric media developed, was also changed by the Internet. According to Pew Research Center (2011) the audience for terrestrial radio has been stable for the past 10 years, but new technologies are slowly affecting the radio audience. The report also shows that 92% of Americans still rely on traditional AM/FM radio stations. Today the demographics show that the largest radio news audience is listeners between 40-49 years old. But the number of news/talk stations increased in 2009 and currently represent 23% of all American radio stations (Pew Research Center, 2011). NPR, the National Public Radio, brings well-respected news shows to public radio stations around the country (Tribune Business News, 2011). Across the nation, 38 million Americans listen to almost 900 public radio stations. These stations provide listeners with local, national and international news, as well as arts, music, and cultural programming (Investment Weekly News, 2011). According to Pew Research Center (2011) NPR's audience grew 30% in 2010; its online audience also grew, with 15.7 million unique visitors in 2010. NPR is present on Twitter with the account "@nprnews". It had more than 67,000 followers in April, 2011, and posts tweets daily. Because of its importance to radio news and its presence on Twitter, NPR was chosen to be analyzed as the national radio station on this study. KMUW is a public radio station affiliated with NPR that broadcasts from The Wichita State University, covering NPR network programs, local news, weather, and music (KMUW.com, 2011). According to the NPR website search engine, KMUW is the affiliated public radio station in Wichita. Considering website traffic, KMUW had 3,688 unique visitors in March, 2011 (Compete, 2011). KMUW is present on Twitter with more than 1,000 followers in

April, 2011 and posts tweets daily. Because of these reasons KMUW's account on Twitter, "@KMUW", was chosen to be analyzed as the local radio station for this study.

In sum, six companies -- two newspaper, television and radio outlets, one national and one local -- were selected for analysis in this study. The companies selected are: *The New York Times* (user name @nytimes); *The Wichita Eagle* (user name @kansasdotcom ); CNN (user name @CNN); KAKE (user name @KAKENews ); NPR (user name @nprnews); and KMUW (user name @KMUW).

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Material located in the public domain was collected and analyzed with the purpose of answering the research questions and testing hypotheses previously presented. The companies' activity on Twitter was observed daily for a period of two months, starting on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, until April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. The data that collected consisted of tweets posted by the companies, and retweets and replies connected to these tweets. Every day each company's page on Twitter was accessed, every tweet posted by the organization was collected, as well as the replies and retweets that were produced based on that single tweet. This data was archived on separate word files by company and further analyzed. The companies with national reach produced tweets almost every hour, and companies from the Wichita are posted at least 5 times a day. Because of the amount of tweets collected, parameters were used to select tweets to be analyzed. According to a market research conducted by the company Sysomos in 2010, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday are the most popular days for Twitter activity. During the day the most Twitter activity happens between 12 P.M. to 3 P.M. (Sysomos Inc., 2010). Based on those facts the sample collected were tweets produced by the six news media companies every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, from 12 P.M. to 3 P.M., during that period of two months.

### **3.3 Analysis**

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected based on the method proposed by Boyatzis (1998). According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a way of seeing that is developed by observing, recognizing an important moment, and encoding it, in order to interpret and understand a phenomenon. It enables researchers to use a wide variety of information in a systematic manner that increases accuracy and sensitivity in interpreting observations about events, people, and/or organizations (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is used to perceive patterns or themes in seemingly random information. “A theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon...The themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). There are three stages of thematic analysis. The first stage involves sampling and design issues. The second stage is to develop themes and a code. And the third stage is to validate and use the code.

The first stage, sampling, was discussed in the prior section; data was collected from six media source Twitter accounts. The efficacy of this sampling was assessed according to Boyatzis (1998), by concluding that there are sufficient units for analysis. Each company posts tweets almost hourly, and tweets will be collected for a period of two months. These tweets were then narrowed to the periods of time that Twitter has more activity. Therefore, there were sufficient units to analyze the strategies used by these companies on Twitter. The efficiency of the sampling was also supported as the choice of companies was made based on their relevance in the field and their active engagement with Twitter.

The second stage, developing themes and codes, was divided into four phases: Organize the data, develop themes deductively, develop themes inductively, and construct a thematic code.

#### 1. Organize the data

First tweets from each company were collected in separate data files. After the data was collected, tweets were color coded and printed so they could be cut up and sorted into themes and subthemes. Tweets from *The New York Times* were printed on white paper; Tweets from *The Wichita Eagle* were on blue paper. CNN tweets were printed on orange paper; KAKE News tweets were on yellow paper. NPR tweets were printed on gray paper, and KMUW tweets were on green paper. Two copies of the files were printed. One to be analyzed by themes developed deductively, and another by themes developed inductively.

#### 2. Develop themes deductively

2. 1. Second, this study utilized a deductive approach to identify themes based on prior research and theory. Based on the literature review for this study the following themes were identified as relevant for deductive analysis: Categorization of tweets as (a) informational, (b) promotional, or (c) conversational. Informational tweets present the audience with local or national news about politics, weather, crime, social life, etc. They may or may not contain a link to more information about the subject. This theme was predicted because all of the six companies analyzed are primarily news organizations that use Twitter to attract visitors to their main websites and to spread news. The second theme, promotional, considered tweets that offer something to followers, should they retweet the company or go to a website. This is a marketing strategy that, according to prior research (Morrissey, 2010), is often seen on Twitter. The third theme covered tweets that directly address the audience by asking questions, opinions, or inviting them to share pictures and videos.

2. 2. The researcher first searched for these deductive themes within each company. Each tweet was be marked by letters a, b, or c that correspond to the themes (a) informational, (b) promotional, or (c) conversational. Tweets could be categorized based on one or multiple deductive themes. Tweets were then sorted into categories based on this classification, reread and sorted into emergent subthemes within each category. Results were put in a table that show how many tweets each company had for each theme. After separate tables were created by company, tables were compared by company type (newspaper, television, or radio) for similarities and differences. Once similarities and differences by media type were identified, a final cross cutting analysis took place in which themes from all three media types were compared and contrasted to identify common and unique subthemes within the (a) informational, (b) promotional, or (c) conversational themes.

3. The second copy of the data was used for inductive thematic analysis. The researcher immersed herself in the data and compared tweets to find similarities and differences among them. According to Boyatzis (1998), this process is called immersion and crystallization and was used to inductively perceive categories within each sample and themes and subthemes not accounted for in prior research and theory. The data was also analyzed first by company, then by source type, and finally by cross cutting analysis of all six companies. Findings are reported in tables by company in terms of themes and subthemes developed inductively, then by company type, then by similarities and differences revealed in the cross cutting analysis. The material was reviewed repeatedly and the data was separated on the basis of emergent themes and subthemes.

4. Once tweets were grouped into deductive and inductive themes and subthemes, the next step in the thematic analysis process was to encode the patterns and themes perceived, by giving them a label and/or description (Boyatzis, 1989). This process consists in developing an



explicit code that presents a list of the themes that emerged from the data and a description of these themes. The compilation of codes in a study is called a *codebook* (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Boyatzis (1998), a thematic code should be usable in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the research. In order to meet these expectations, this study developed a thematic code containing five elements: a label; a definition of the theme; a description of how to know when the theme occurs; a description of qualifications and exclusions to the identification of the theme; and examples.

The third stage of a thematic analysis process is to validate the code and use it. This is an iterative, reflective process in which the codes identified in the prior step are compared with the tables created through initial deductive and inductive data analysis. Deductively, clusters were compared with literature reviewed, branding strategies and signs of the effects of social media on communication. Inductively, clusters were compared with prior research and theory in order to draw insights. After the data is analyzed, the next step of this study was to interpret the information in order to answer the research questions, test the hypotheses, and contribute to knowledge by developing new theory.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

During a period of two months tweets posted by six news media companies were collected from Twitter.com to be analyzed. These tweets were filtered according to the days of the week and daily hours that had higher Twitter activity. Tweets posted every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, from noon to 3 P.M. were selected during that two month period for further analysis. This selection process resulted in 775 tweets. Table 2 shows the amount of tweets posted by each company, the correspondent percentage of those tweets to the total of tweets, and the average of tweets posted per day by each company. As shown in Table 2, *The New York Times* had the most tweets, 232 or 30% of the total number of tweets. It was followed by NPR with 220 tweets (28.4%) *The Wichita Eagle* with 118 tweets (15.2%). KMUW had 73 tweets (9.4%), followed by KAKE News with 68 tweets (8.8%). CNN had the smallest number of tweets with 64 or 8.2%. The companies posted an average of 4.8 tweets per day. *The New York Times* posted 8.6 tweets/day, NPR, 8.2 tweets/day, *The Wichita Eagle* 4.4 tweets/day, KMUW 2.7 tweets/day. KAKE News posted an average of 2.5 tweets/day, and CNN 2.4 tweets/day.

TABLE 2  
NUMBER OF TWEETS COLLECTED

Tweets collected							
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE News	NPR	KMUW	TOTAL
<b>Tweets posted</b>	<b>232</b>	118	64	68	220	73	<b>775</b>
<b>Percentage of total tweets</b>	<b>30%</b>	15.2%	8.2%	8.8%	28.4%	9.4%	
<b>Average tweets/day</b>	<b>8.6</b>	4.4	2.4	2.5	8.2	2.7	<b>4.8</b>

The 775 tweets collected were retweeted by other users that follow those companies on Twitter 18,087 times. Table 3 shows the number of times each company was retweeted, the correspondent percentage of retweets to the total of retweets, the average of times that each tweet was retweeted, and the average number of times that each follower retweeted the company. As shown in table 3, the companies that were most often retweeted were *The New York Times*, retweeted 8,442 times, NPR, retweeted 4,924 times, and CNN, retweeted 4,549 times. *The Wichita Eagle* was retweeted 82 times, KAKE News, 76 times, and KMUW only 14 times. It is interesting to note that only two of *The New York Times*' tweets were not retweeted by any follower, and only one tweet from NPR was not retweeted by anyone. The ranking of companies that post more tweets did not match the companies that were more retweeted. On average, every tweet posted by CNN was retweeted 71.1 times, *The New York Times* tweets were retweeted on average 36.1 times, NPR, 22.4 times, KAKE News 1.1 times, *The Wichita Eagle* 0.7 times, and KMUW tweets were retweeted on average 0.2 times. But the results were different when the number of retweets was compared to the number of followers that each company has. The rate of retweet per follower was higher for local companies than for national companies. *The Wichita Eagle* had 0.03 retweets per follower, KAKE News had 0.02, and KMUW 0.01. While NPR had 0.01 retweets per follower, and CNN and *The New York Times* had 0.003.

TABLE 3  
TWEETS RETWEETED BY FOLLOWERS

Tweets retweeted by other users						
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE	NPR	KMUW
<b>Total retweets</b>	<b>8442</b>	82	4549	76	4924	14
<b>Percentage of total retweets</b>	<b>46.7%</b>	0.5%	25.1%	0.4%	27.2%	0.1%
<b>Retweets/tweets posted</b>	36.1	0.7	<b>71.1</b>	1.1	22.4	0.2
<b>Retweets/followers</b>	0.003	<b>0.03</b>	0.003	0.02	0.01	0.01

The tweets collected had different characteristics. The researcher noticed five relevant characteristics in the tweets collected: links to external websites; mentions to other users; retweets from other users; links to photos; and replies to specific tweets from other users. These characteristics are shown in Table 4 with the correspondent percentage of tweets to the total of tweets posted with the respective characteristic. Tweets could also have two or more of these characteristics simultaneously. The majority of the tweets collected contained links to external websites (680 tweets). One hundred and twelve tweets mentioned other twitter users, and 62 tweets were retweets from other users. There were 31 tweets with links to pictures and 18 replies to other tweets. *The Wichita Eagle* had the largest amount of tweets containing mentions (39), replies (10), and retweets (25). *The New York Times* had more tweets containing links (220) and NPR had more tweets with links to photos (23).

TABLE 4  
TWEETS' CHARACTERISTICS

Tweets' characteristics							
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE	NPR	KMUW	TOTAL
<b>Mentions</b>	29 (25.9%)	<b>39</b> <b>(34.8%)</b>	11 (9.8%)	26 (23.2%)	4 (3.6%)	3 (2.7%)	<b>112</b>
<b>Replies</b>	0	<b>10</b> <b>(55.6%)</b>	0	8 (44.4%)	0	0	<b>18</b>
<b>Retweets</b>	8 (12.9%)	<b>25</b> <b>(40.3%)</b>	7 (11.3%)	21 (33.9%)	0	1 (1.6%)	<b>62</b>
<b>Photos</b>	3 (9.7%)	0	2 (6.5%)	1 (3.1%)	<b>23</b> <b>(74.2%)</b>	2 (6.5%)	<b>31</b>
<b>Links</b>	<b>220</b> <b>(32.4%)</b>	89 (13.1%)	58 (8.5%)	24 (3.5%)	218 (32.1%)	71 (10.4%)	<b>680</b>

After observing these general tweet characteristics, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis and separated the tweets according to three deductively developed themes: (a) informational, (b) promotional, and (c) conversational. These themes were predicted based on

the literature review (Morrissey, 2010; Jansen et al., 2009) and are shown in Table 5. The percentages on this table correspond to the total of tweets analyzed.

TABLE 5  
TWEET THEMES DEVELOPED DEDUCTIVELY

Tweet Themes							
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE News	NPR	KMUW	Total
<b>A - Informational</b>	210 (27.1%)	63 (8.1%)	51 (6.6%)	53 (6.8%)	<b>215</b> <b>(27.8%)</b>	63 (8.1%)	<b>655</b> <b>(84.5%)</b>
<b>B - Promotional</b>	8 (1%)	<b>10</b> <b>(1.3%)</b>	5 (0.7%)	3 (0.4%)	2 (0.3%)	8 (1%)	<b>36</b> <b>(4.7%)</b>
<b>C - Conversational</b>	5 (0.7%)	<b>27</b> <b>(3.4%)</b>	2 (0.3%)	10 (1.3%)	1 (0.1%)	2 (0.3%)	<b>47</b> <b>(6.1%)</b>
<b>AB - Informational &amp; Promotional</b>	4 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)	<b>5</b> <b>(0.7%)</b>	0	1 (0.1%)	0	<b>11</b> <b>(1.4%)</b>
<b>BC - Promotional &amp; Conversational</b>	5 (0.7%)	<b>16</b> <b>(2%)</b>	1 (0.1%)	0	0	0	<b>22</b> <b>(2.8%)</b>
<b>AC - Informational &amp; Conversational</b>	0	1 (0.1%)	0	<b>2</b> <b>(0.3%)</b>	1 (0.1%)	0	<b>4</b> <b>(0.5%)</b>

The majority of the tweets fell in the first category “Informational”; there were 655 informational tweets. This category was predicted because the subjects of this research are news media companies whose predominant task is spreading information, thus it was expected that this would be reflected on their usage of social media. This category represented tweets that contain news and information. The tweets were usually characterized by a news headline and a link to the full story on the company’s website. One example is the tweet from NPR posted on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. “Driver Who Ran Through Crowd of Bike Riders Arrested <http://n.pr/g9FLMo>”. Informational tweets informed followers of news such as crimes, politics, weather, and other subjects. Some of the informational tweets contained only headlines without links, and others had links to videos, pictures, and other content. These differences will be further explained in categories subthemes below. NPR posted 215 informational tweets, The New Your Times posted

210, *The Wichita Eagle* posted 63, KMUW also posted 63, KAKE News posted 53, and CNN was responsible for 51 informational tweets.

The second theme, “Promotional”, had 36 tweets across the 6 news media companies. This category contained tweets that promote companies, services, websites, reporters, twitter users, TV and radio programs, contests, and events. Promotional tweets suggested that Twitter users follow other users, presented a contest where readers could win prizes, or promoted events and programs. For example, *The Wichita Eagle* posted on March 2<sup>nd</sup>: “Want two free tickets (a \$23 value) to the Wichita Garden Show? Find out how to enter to win: <http://on.fb.me/crHMOK>”. This tweet promoted the event, offered tickets to users, and stimulated traffic to their main website. The “Promotional” theme was predicted because previous research showed that companies often offer something to followers to attract traffic and make followers more interested in the company (Morrisey, 2010). There were 36 tweets in this category that promoted websites (17), users (6), causes (4), and gave out prizes (9). *The Wichita Eagle* posted the largest number of promotional tweets with 10, followed by KMUW and *The New York Times* with 8 each, CNN with 5 tweets, KAKE News with 3 tweets, and NPR with 2 promotional tweets.

The third theme, “Conversational”, contained 47 tweets. Tweets in this category generated conversation between companies and their followers. This theme was predicted because the literature review showed that twitter is used (or should be used) to engage in conversations with target publics (Jansen et al., 2009). Strategies included asking for opinions or pictures and sending replies to specific users. *The Wichita Eagle*, for example posted on March 22: “We haven’t asked in a while, so how’s our tweeting? Too many tweets? Too few? Any thoughts appreciated.” After posting this tweet *The Wichita Eagle* received some replies from

users, and then replied back to 9 different users during the period of time analyzed. *The Wichita Eagle* had the most tweets on this third theme, 27, followed by KAKE News with 10 tweets, and *The New York Times* with 5 tweets. CNN and KMUW had 2 tweets each, and NPR had only 1 tweet that generated conversation.

During the process of analyzing tweets deductively, the researcher noticed that some tweets could fall into more than one category simultaneously. Because of that, 3 additional themes were developed: Informational and promotional (ab); promotional and conversational (bc); and informational and conversational (ac). The “Informational and Promotional” theme consisted of tweets that spread news but at the same time promoted a TV program (3), a video (2), a user (2), or a website (4). For example: “Advanced-tech vehicles to be deployed by major companies. We examine Pres. Obama’s alternative fuel & energy plan at 1:45pm ET.”, posted by CNN on April 1<sup>st</sup>. This tweet gave the news and at the same time promoted CNN’s news program on TV. This category had 11 tweets, 5 from CNN, 4 from *The New York Times*, 1 from NPR, and 1 from *The Wichita Eagle*. The next theme, “Promotional and Conversational”, referred to tweets that promoted programs, websites, and users and generated conversation simultaneously by asking questions (3) or inviting users to chat (19). *The New York Times* posted on February 25<sup>th</sup>: “#Oscar night preview: <http://nyti.ms/gj9tvp> Watch @carr2n & @aoscott during commercials, chat with Facebook & follow @nytimesmovies.” This tweet promoted *The New York Times* coverage of the Academic Awards, and at the same time invited followers to chat and follow other users. This theme had 22 tweets. *The Wichita Eagle* was responsible for 16 of those tweets, *The New York Times* for 5, and CNN posted 1 “Promotional and Conversational” tweet. The last theme, “Informational and Conversational”, spread news to users and at the same time asked for opinions about the subject (3) or for contributions such as pictures (1). For

example, KAKE News tweeted on March 16<sup>th</sup>: “Firefighters are battling a 2-alarm apartment fire near 18th & Rock; Smoke & fire on a 2nd floor balcony. Are you in the area? Any photos?” This tweet informed followers about breaking news and invited followers to share information and pictures about the subject. This category had only 4 tweets, 2 from KAKE News, 1 from *The Wichita Eagle*, and 1 from NPR.

After analyzing and categorizing the data into deductive themes, the researcher conducted another thematic analysis to develop inductive themes. The inductive analysis and the themes that emerged showed that the deductive themes developed previously provided a useful frame for organizing the inductive themes. The researcher then organized the inductive themes as subthemes of the 3 main deductive themes. The inductive analysis resulted in different subthemes for each of the three main deductively developed themes (“Informational”, “Promotional”, and “Conversational”). The first theme, “Informational”, had the majority of the tweets, and was organized into 7 subthemes, as shown in table 6: news with links (a1); news without links (a2); mentions (a3); retweets (a4); photos (a5); video (a6); and music (a7). Table 6 shows the amount of tweets that fell under each subtheme and the correspondent percentage of the total of tweets analyzed.

TABLE 6  
INFORMATIONAL SUBTHEMES

<b>Informational subthemes</b>							
	<b>NY Times</b>	<b>Wichita Eagle</b>	<b>CNN</b>	<b>KAKE</b>	<b>NPR</b>	<b>KMUW</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>A1 - News with links</b>	<b>196 (25.3%)</b>	33 (4.3%)	43 (5.5%)	14 (1.8%)	183 (23.6%)	59 (7.6%)	<b>528 (68.1%)</b>
<b>A2 - News without links</b>	0	7 (0.9%)	0	<b>20 (2.5%)</b>	0	2 (0.3%)	<b>29 (3.7%)</b>
<b>A3 - Mentions</b>	2 (0.3%)	<b>8 (1%)</b>	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	0	0	<b>12 (1.5%)</b>



TABLE 6 (continued)

Informational subthemes							
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE	NPR	KMUW	Total
<b>A4- Retweets</b>	7 (0.9%)	13 (1.7%)	3 <b>(0.4%)</b>	17 (2.2%)	0	0	40 <b>(5.2%)</b>
<b>A5 - Photos</b>	3 (0.4%)	0	2 (0.3%)	1 (0.1%)	23 <b>(3%)</b>	2 (0.3%)	31 <b>(4.1%)</b>
<b>A6 - Video</b>	1 (0.1%)	2 <b>(0.3%)</b>	2 <b>(0.3%)</b>	0	1 (0.1%)	0	6 <b>(0.8%)</b>
<b>A7 - Music</b>	1 (0.1%)	0	0	0	8 <b>(1%)</b>	0	9 <b>(1.1%)</b>

The first subtheme, “News with links”, had the most tweets, 528. It represents tweets that contained a news headline and a link to the full story. *The New York Times* posted on March 9<sup>th</sup>: “Lawsuit Lenders Try to Limit Exposure to Consumer Rules <http://nyti.ms/gJ5oQK>”. The majority of the tweets collected were constructed similarly to this example. In this subtheme 197 tweets were from *The New York Times*, 183 tweets were from NPR, 58 tweets were posted by KMUW, 43 were from CNN, 33 were from *The Wichita Eagle*, and 14 were from KAKE News.

The second subtheme, “News without links”, had 29 tweets. This subtheme was similar to the first one, but is consisted only of news headlines, without links, for example: “Sedgwick County says between midnight and 2:30 am, it responded to 70 non-injury accidents and 19 injury crashes” posted by KAKE News on February 8<sup>th</sup>. Tweets in this category were posted by local companies and were related to local subjects, such as weather, schools closing, road situations, game scores, or news updates. These tweets present breaking news that keeps the public informed. KAKE News posted 20 of the tweets in that category, *The Wichita Eagle* posted 7, and KMUW posted 2.

“Mentions” was the third subtheme and consisted of tweets that came from other reporters (7) or via other sources (4), but were not actual retweets. For example, *The Wichita*

*Eagle* posted on March 11<sup>th</sup>: “Wichita school employees suggest budget cut ideas, @suzannetobias reports [#ictschools](http://bit.ly/errsCg)”. This subtheme had 11 tweets, 8 from *The Wichita Eagle*, 1 from KAKE News, 1 from CNN, and 1 from *The New York Times*.

The fourth subtheme was “Retweets”, and consisted of tweets from other sources or reporters retweeted by the companies analyzed. KAKE News posted on April 1<sup>st</sup>: “RT @sjohnson17okc: Bob Barry Jr confirms through 3 sources UNLV coach Lon Kruger to be next head coach at OU.” Tweets under this subtheme usually came from reporters (22) or affiliates of the news company (10) or other news and information sources (8), as for example @KansasTurnpikeKansas or @CNNTravel. This subtheme had 40 tweets, 17 being from KAKE News, 13 from *The Wichita Eagle*, 7 from *The New York Times*, and 3 from CNN.

The fifth subtheme, “Photos”, consisted of links to pictures and contained 31 tweets. These tweets were either constructed only with a link to a picture (15) (“Photo: markcoatney:<http://tumblr.com/xu81hj21>” posted by NPR on February 11<sup>th</sup>), or with a legend and a link to a picture (16) (“The snow is heavy across Kansas. Check out these photos. [Http://bit.ly/8MIspl](http://bit.ly/8MIspl)” posted by KAKE News on February 8<sup>th</sup>). NPR posted 23 tweets classified in this subtheme, *The New York Times* posted 3 tweets, KMUW and CNN posted 2 tweets each, and KAKE News posted 1 tweet with a link to a picture.

The next subtheme, “Video”, represented tweets that shared a link to a video. As with the photo subtheme, this theme also presented tweets that had either a link to a video (1) or a legend with a link to a video (5). An example of a “Video” tweet was posted *The Wichita Eagle* on February 8<sup>th</sup>: “VIDEO: Cars spin out on I-235. <http://bit.ly/etgBNF> #ksstorms #wichita”. *The Wichita Eagle* posted 2 tweets with links to videos, CNN also posted 2, *The New York Times* and NPR posted 1 each, for a total of 6 tweets that contained links to videos.

The final subtheme under the informational theme was “Music”, with 9 tweets. This subtheme represented tweets that suggested a song and shared a link to the song. For example, NPR posted on March 22<sup>nd</sup>: “Song of the day: World Premiere: Thurston Moore’s Beautiful „Benediction’ <http://n.pr/hBDW2c>”. NPR posted 8 of these tweets while *The New York Times* posted 1.

Three inductive themes were organized as subthemes under the “Promotional” theme,; follows (b1); promote (b2); and contributions (b3). Table 7 shows the amount of tweets that fell under each subtheme and the correspondent percentage of the total of tweets analyzed.

TABLE 7  
PROMOTIONAL SUBTHEMES

Promotional subthemes							
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE	NPR	KMUW	Total
<b>B1 - Follows</b>	4 (0.5%)	0	0	0	1 (0.1%)	0	5 (0.7%)
<b>B2 - Promote</b>	4 (0.5%)	3 (0.4%)	5 (0.7%)	0	1 (0.1%)	4 (0.5%)	17 (2.2%)
<b>B3 - Contributions</b>	0	7 (0.9%)	0	3 (0.4%)	0	4 (0.5%)	14 (1.8%)

The first subtheme, “Follows”, represents tweets that suggested that Twitter users follow journalists or other users. For example: “For tweets from journalists in the NYT video unit, follow @annderry @matthew\_orr @olsentropy #FF” posted by *The New York Times* on April 1<sup>st</sup>. This subtheme contained 5 tweets, 4 from *The New York Times*, and 1 from NPR.

The second subtheme, “Promote”, promotes websites (5), journalists (1), photo galleries (3), programs (6), events (2), etc, related to services provided by the company. *The New York Times*, for example, posted a tweet that promoted their application for iPhone and New York Fashion Week: “Are you in New York for Fashion Week? The NYT Scoop iPhone app has a

special guide to the #nyfw scene <http://but.ly/9k75JV>". Other tweets were similar and promoted television programs, blogs from reporters, events sponsored by the companies. This subtheme had 17 tweets, 5 from CNN, 4 from *The New York Times*, 4 from KMUW, 3 from *The Wichita Eagle*, and 1 from NPR.

The last subtheme under the promotional theme, "Contributions", consisted of tweets that offered followers something or asked for contributions. Tweets in this subtheme offered followers prizes (10) or asked for help with humanitarian causes (4). For example *The Wichita Eagle* posted on march 18<sup>th</sup>: "Enter our Facebook contest for a chance to win tickets to Spamalot. <http://on.fb.me/crHMOK>". Or KAKE News tweeted on March 11<sup>th</sup>: "How 2 help; text the word "Japan" to 80888 to give a \$10.00 donation to The Salvation Army's earthquake relief work". This category had 14 tweets, 7 from *The Wichita Eagle*, 4 from KMUW, and 3 from KAKE News.

The third theme, "Conversational", had 2 subthemes developed inductively: personal conversations (c1); and asking for contributions (c2), as shown in Table 8. Table 8 shows the amount of tweets that fell under each subtheme and the correspondent percentage of the total of tweets analyzed.

TABLE 8  
CONVERSATIONAL SUBTHEMES

Conversational subthemes							
	NY Times	Wichita Eagle	CNN	KAKE	NPR	KMUW	Total
<b>C1 - Personal conversations</b>	0	20 (2.7%)	0	9 (1.1%)	0	0	29 (3.8%)
<b>C2 - Asking for contributions</b>	5 (0.7%)	7 (0.9%)	2 (0.3%)	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	2 (0.3%)	18 (2.3%)

The first subtheme, “Personal conversations”, referred to replies (26) or tweets addressed to specific users (3). This subtheme had 29 tweets, 20 from *The Wichita Eagle*, and 9 from KAKE News. For example, in March 22<sup>nd</sup> *The Wichita Eagle* replied to a tweet posted by one specific user:

“@Lshayusa @kansasdotcom I quit following mobile a while back due to too many tweets from you that did not interest me. (cont)<http://t.l.gd/9e2dfh> in reply to [@kansasdotcom](https://twitter.com/kansasdotcom) @Lshayusa Sorry to hear that. Were you getting our tweets as text messages?

The last subtheme, “Asking for contributions”, represented tweets that asked followers to contribute to the conversation with opinions (14), pictures (3), or video (1). *The New York Times* posted on February 11<sup>th</sup>: “What are your thoughts on today’s #Egypt news? We’re putting selected comments and tweets on the homepage”. This subtheme had a total of 18 tweets. *The Wichita Eagle* posted 7 tweets that fell under this category, *The New York Times* posted 5 tweets, KMUW and CNN each had 2 tweets, and KAKE News and NPR posted only 1 tweet each of this category.

After analyzing the data for deductive and inductive themes, the companies were compared by company media type (newspaper, television, and radio). *The New York Times* was compared to *The Wichita Eagle*, CNN was compared to KAKE News, and NPR was compared to KMUW.

Table 9 compares the newspaper companies, *The New York Times* and *The Wichita Eagle*. It presents the amount of tweets posted by these companies that fell in each category and the correspondent percentage according to the total of tweets posted by that specific company. The comparison between the two newspaper companies (Table 9) showed that *The New York Times* tweeted almost twice as much as *The Wichita Eagle*. It also had 867 times more followers than *The Wichita Eagle* and it was retweeted 103 times more frequently. The larger number of

retweets is expected, because the national company has more followers than the local company. Actually The Wichita Eagle had more retweets per follower (0.03) than *The New York Times* (0.003). *The Wichita Eagle* also showed more variety on the types of tweets posted. *The New York Times* posted mostly informational tweets (90.5%), and 84.5% of those were tweets with links to news stories on their website. While only 53.4% of *The Wichita Eagle*'s tweets were informational and only 28% were news with links. The local company had more tweets that developed conversations with users. *The Wichita Eagle* posted 33% of their tweets mentioning other users, 21.2% were retweets from other users, and 8.5 % were replies to other users. *The New York Times* posted 12.5% of their tweets mentioning other users, only 3.5% were retweets, and did not reply to any tweet from other users. *The Wichita Eagle* also had more tweets under the “Promotional” (8.5%), “Conversational” (22.9%), “Promotional and Conversational” (13.6%), and “Informational and Conversational” (0.8%) themes.

TABLE 9

COMPARISON BETWEEN NEWSPAPER COMPANIES

The New York Times				The Wichita Eagle			
Total of tweets posted: 232				Total of tweets posted: 118			
Themes	Subthemes	Number of tweets	% of total tweets	Themes	Subthemes	Number of tweets	% of total tweets
A - Informational		210	90.5%	A - Informational		63	53.4%
	News with link	196	84.5%		News with link	33	28%
	News without link	0	0		News without link	7	5.9%
	Mentions	2	0.9%		Mentions	8	6.8%
	Retweets	7	3%		Retweets	13	11%
	Photos	3	1.3%		Photos	0	0
	Video	1	0.4%		Video	2	1.7%
	Music	1	0.4%		Music	0	0
B- Promotional		8	3.4%	B- Promotional		10	8.5%
	Follow	4	1.7%		Follow	0	0
	Promote	4	1.7%		Promote	3	2.6%
	Contributions	0	0		Contributions	7	5.9%

TABLE 9 (continued)

The New York Times			The Wichita Eagle				
C- Conversational		5	2.2%	C- Conversational		27	22.9%
	Personal Conversations	0	0		Personal Conversations	20	17%
	Asking for contributions	5	2.2%		Asking for contributions	7	5.9%
AB - Informational and Promotional		4	1.7%	AB - Informational and Promotional		1	0.8%
BC - Promotional and Conversational		5	2.2%	BC - Promotional and Conversational		16	13.6%
AC - Informational and Conversational		0	0	AC - Informational and Conversational		1	0.8%
<b>Other characteristics</b>			<b>Other characteristics</b>				
Mentions		29	12.5%	Mentions		39	33%
Replies		0	0	Replies		10	8.5%
Retweets		8	3.5%	Retweets		25	21.2%
Photos		3	1.3%	Photos		0	0
Links		220	94.8%	Links		89	75.4%
Retweeted by other users		8442		Retweeted by other users		82	
Number of followers		2,600,000		Number of followers		3000	

Table 10 presents the comparison between the two television companies, CNN and KAKE News, with the amount of tweets posted by these companies that fell in each category and the correspondent percentage according to the total of tweets posted by that specific company. That comparison showed that CNN tweeted less than KAKE News, but was retweeted almost 60 times more than KAKE News. CNN also had 440 times more followers than KAKE News, but had fewer retweets per follower (0.003) than KAKE News (0.02). For both companies the majority of tweets were “Informational” (79.7% of CNN’s tweets and 78% of KAKE News tweets), but KAKE News posted a larger variety of “Informational” tweets. Only 20.6% of KAKE’s “Informational” tweets were “news with link”, while 67.2% of CNN’s “Informational” tweets fell in that subtheme. KAKE News posted more tweets that generate conversations (14.7%) compared to CNN (3.1%), and CNN posted more “Promotional” tweets (7.8%) than KAKE News (4.4%). The local company also interacted more with other users, 38.2% of their

tweets mentioned, 30.9% retweeted, and 11.8% replied. While 17.2 of tweets posted by CNN mentioned other users, only 10.9% retweeted other posts, and there were no replies to other tweets.

TABLE 10  
COMPARISON BETWEEN TELEVISION COMPANIES

CNN				KAKE News			
Total of tweets posted: 64				Total of tweets posted: 68			
Themes	Subthemes	Number of tweets	% of total tweets	Themes	Subthemes	Number of tweets	% of total tweets
A - Informational		51	79.7%	A - Informational		53	78.0%
	News with link	43	67.2%		News with link	14	20.6%
	News without link	0	0		News without link	20	29.4%
	Mentions	1	1.6%		Mentions	1	1.5%
	Retweets	3	4.7%		Retweets	17	25%
	Photos	2	3.1%		Photos	1	1.5%
	Video	2	3.1%		Video	0	0
	Music	0	0		Music	0	0
B- Promotional		5	7.8%	B- Promotional		3	4.4%
	Follow	0	0		Follow	0	0
	Promote	5	7.8%		Promote	0	0
	Contributions	0	0		Contributions	3	4.4%
C- Conversational		2	3.1%	C- Conversational		10	14.7%
	Personal Conversations	0	0		Personal Conversations	9	13.2%
	Asking for contributions	2	3.1%		Asking for contributions	1	1.5%
AB - Informational and Promotional		5	7.8%	AB - Informational and Promotional		0	0
BC - Promotional and Conversational		1	1.6%	BC - Promotional and Conversational		0	0
AC - Informational and Conversational		0	0	AC - Informational and Conversational		2	2.9%
<b>Other characteristics</b>				<b>Other characteristics</b>			
Mentions		11	17.2%	Mentions		26	38.2%
Replies		0	0	Replies		8	11.8%
Retweets		7	10.9%	Retweets		21	30.9%
Photos		2	3.1%	Photos		1	1.5%
Links		58	90.6%	Links		24	25.3%
Retweeted by other users		4,549		Retweeted by other users		76	
Number of followers		1,675,000		Number of followers		3,800	



The comparison between the two radio companies (Table 11) demonstrated that NPR tweeted 3 times more than KMUW, had 511 times more followers, and was retweeted 1231 times more than KMUW. Both companies had the same number of retweets per follower (0.01). NPR had more “Informational” tweets (97.6%) that also fell in a larger variety of subthemes under this theme. NPR had more tweets that posted photos, music, and video. But KMUW had more “Promotional” (11%) and “Conversational” (2.7%) tweets. A larger percentage of KMUW’s tweets mentioned other users (4.1%), retweeted other users (1.4%); neither company replied to any tweet posted by another user.

TABLE 11  
COMPARISON BETWEEN RADIO COMPANIES

NPR				KMUW			
Total of tweets posted: 220				Total of tweets posted: 73			
Themes	Subthemes	Number of tweets	% of total tweets	Themes	Subthemes	Number of tweets	% of total tweets
A - Informational		215	97.6%	A - Informational		63	86.3%
	News with link	183	83.1%		News with link	59	80.9%
	News without link	0	0		News without link	2	2.7%
	Mentions	0	0		Mentions	0	0
	Retweets	0	0		Retweets	0	0
	Photos	23	10.4%		Photos	2	2.7%
	Video	1	0.5%		Video	0	0
	Music	8	3.6%		Music	0	0
B- Promotional		2	1%	B- Promotional		8	11%
	Follow	1	0.5%		Follow	0	0
	Promote	1	0.5%		Promote	4	5.5%
	Contributions	0	0		Contributions	4	5.5%
C- Conversational		1	0.5%	C- Conversational		2	2.7%
	Personal Conversations	0	0		Personal Conversations	0	0
	Asking for contributions	1	0.5%		Asking for contributions	2	2.7%
AB - Informational and Promotional		1	0.5%	AB - Informational and Promotional		0	0
BC - Promotional and Conversational		0	0	BC - Promotional and Conversational		0	0
AC - Informational and Conversational		1	0.5%	AC - Informational and Conversational		0	0

TABLE 11 (continued)

NPR			KMUW		
<b>Other characteristics</b>			<b>Other characteristics</b>		
Mentions	4	1.8%	Mentions	3	4.1%
Replies	0	0	Replies	0	0
Retweets	0	0	Retweets	1	1.4%
Photos	23	10.4%	Photos	2	2.7%
Links	218	99.1%	Links	71	97.3%
Retweeted by other users	4,924		Retweeted by other users	14	
Number of followers	511,000		Number of followers	1,000	

Overall the comparison between companies of the same news media type showed that local companies posted a larger variety of tweets. National companies tweeted more “Informational” tweets, while local companies had more tweets under the “Promotional” and “Conversational” themes, with the exception of the television companies. Numbers also showed that the national companies (*The New York Times*, CNN, and NPR) have more followers and are retweeted more often than the local companies (*The Wichita Eagle*, KAKE News, and KMUW). With the exception of CNN, national companies also posted more tweets than the local companies. But a larger percentage of the tweets posted by local companies are addressed to specific users, retweeted, and mentioned more other users.

An analysis cross cutting all 6 companies show that NPR was the company that posted more informational tweets (97.6%), KMUW posted more “Promotional” tweets (11%), and *The Wichita Eagle* had more tweets under the theme “Conversational” (22.9%). The theme “Informational and Promotional” had the most tweets from CNN (7.8%), “Promotional and Conversational” from *The Wichita Eagle* (13.6%), and “Informational and Conversational” from KAKE News (2.9%). Every company had the most tweets in at least one subtheme. *The New York Times* posted more tweets than the other companies under the subthemes “news with links”

(84.5%) and “follow” (1.7%). *The Wichita Eagle* had the largest number of “mentions” (6.8%), “personal conversations” (17%), and “asking for contributions” (5.9%). CNN posted the most tweets under “promote” (7.8%). KAKE News had more “news without links” tweets (29.4%) and “retweets” (25%). NPR posted the most tweets under the subthemes “photos” (10.4%) and “music” (3.6%). KMUW posted the most tweets under the subtheme “contributions” (5.5%). An overall analysis of tweets characteristics showed that KAKE News posted the most tweets that mentioned (38.2%), replied (11.8%), and retweeted (30.9%) other users. NPR had more tweets that had links to external websites (99.1%) and more tweets with links to photos (10.4%).

In sum, the thematic analysis of 775 tweets revealed 6 themes and 12 subthemes that can be used to categorize tweets from news media companies. These themes and subthemes were developed by deductive and inductive processes in which the researcher was immersed in the data to find insights, similarities, and differences. The results found through this analysis will be discussed further in the next chapter connecting the results with theories and premises discussed previously.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The literature review for this project covered subjects such as media, social media, and branding. The companies analyzed in this study were news media companies that were built through traditional electronic media (newspaper, television, and radio) developed during the first part of the fourth phase of human communication development, secondary orality (Galbreath, 2011). These media were the first to compel commitment and participation, and offered the possibility of the occurrence of action and reaction on the part of audiences occurring simultaneously (McLuhan, 1994). However, audiences utilizing these traditional media were passive (McLuhan, 1994). Radio, newspaper, and television have a small number of producers communicating messages to a large, fragmented, mass audience (Poster, 1995).

The Internet developed during the second half of the secondary orality phase (Galbreath, 2011) integrated different technologies (satellite, telephone, computer, television, radio). It brought the possibility of the development of social media, building a system of communication of multiple simultaneous producers and consumers (Poster, 1995). Today information can be spread easily through people in different parts of the world. The technologies became interactive, and audience members became interconnected with one another. This phenomenon changed society, bringing a shallower sense of community, in which people from the same geographic location are becoming more diverse, while people in different parts of the world are growing more alike (Meyrowitz, 2005). The world is becoming a global village not only because of the interactivity among people around the world (Dery, 2005), but because of the sense of involvement that occurs within social media.

According to the literature review, technologies are media because they mediate between people and the environment (Strate, 2005). The internet is a technology that uses an interface between human and machine that brings the possibility of the development of a collective intelligence and provides a democratic space where information can be shared (Lévy, 1997). This process leads society into the creation of new media called social media. Considering that media shapes human association and action and impacts society independent of the content of the message (McLuhan 1994; 2002), social media can shape behaviors and thoughts.

Social media are cheap, quick, and readily available (Poster, 1995). They give a large population access to go online to find and spread information. Social media enable virtual communities where users can exchange public messages (Poster, 1995). This phenomenon is also democratizing, because it creates the potential got use to anyone, promotes individual consciousness, and is individually oriented (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). People do not only interact with each other, but with the media themselves, creating new content that is more personalized and interactive (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). This leads to a power shift from media companies to the public who can now also create and deliver information (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

Because this new trend is affecting human relationships and society, it is important to understand the interface that is responsible for these changes, social media. In that sense this project evaluates how news media companies are connecting with their customers through social media. The literature review advanced that social media are shaping society and cultures by changing the way identities (personal and corporate) are constructed (Poster, 1995). All electronic media support a transformation of cultural identity that brings a sense of de-territorialization. This process produced the need to reconstruct social bonds and recast identities for individuals and communities (Lévy, 1997), a need being fulfilled by social media.

The results of this study showed that not every company analyzed actually interacted with users on Twitter. The majority of the tweets from all six companies were informational messages with links to external websites. This fact supports the conclusion that these news media companies are using Twitter much as they used traditional media, to spread news to their audiences rather than interacting with them. Messages are spread from national companies to a large, fragmented mass audience. Local media also spread predominantly the same types of messages. This result supported the hypothesis presented in this study: *The majority of the tweets posted by the companies analyzed will contain links to other websites with more detailed content.* In other words, the news media companies that were analyzed use Twitter most often to spread news, as they did through traditional media, rather than interact with followers.

This result can also be viewed from a different perspective. The presence of these companies on Twitter shows that they are embracing a new form of information sharing. Companies are becoming receptive to interactive networks that have the potential to lead to intelligent communities where consumers can assist in building company identities through interactions on social media (Lévy, 1997). On social media everyone is able to share and navigate through knowledge, bringing the possibility of thinking collectively and also constructing identities collectively (Lévy, 1997). News media companies that post news on Twitter are spreading information for free in a public environment. Thus, to at least some extent, their branding strategies are linked in an interactive relationship with their audiences. The simple presence of these companies on social media, offers an opportunity to interact with audiences in ways that impact the construction of company identities. The identities of the companies analyzed are to some extent being constructed with the influence of the audience present on Twitter.

The results of this study also showed that although the companies analyzed did not produce a lot of conversations with their audiences (this is particularly true of the national companies), they were, to some extent, retweeted by their audiences. Companies with a larger number of followers were retweeted more frequently than those with fewer followers. Users retweeted posts and disseminated them to their own followers thus enabling conversations to go on “forever” (Manovich, 2009). This result can be explained by the fact that Twitter, as a social media tool, is used to share information and report news (Java et al., 2007). For example, NPR, the company that posted the fewest tweets that generated conversations (only 0.5% of its tweets) was retweeted second most frequently. This shows that NPR followers feel part of the community that gathers news from NPR and shares it. Although NPR does not interact with its followers as social media researchers say it should (Solis, 2008), NPR followers develop a community that helps NPR, through retweets, to spread its news. This conclusion is consistent for all six companies analyzed in this study.

According to Wasserman (2009), the main benefit of retweets is that they allow a message to reach new audiences. Having a group of followers that retweet a company’s posts offers the possibility that a message can reach new audiences; tweets can reach users that are not direct followers of the news media company. Researchers showed that 70% of tweeters are passive users that follow, read, and retweet, but do not produce new content (Webster, 2010). These users are also more frequent users of other social networks (Webster, 2010). In that sense the strategy of posting tweets interesting enough for followers to retweet can be a strategy companies use to expand their audiences through Twitter and other social networks.

The fact that tweets can be retweeted by company followers shows that social media have the potential to create a new landscape of influencers and a social environment that encourages

the dissemination of information and brings the possibility of conversations (Solis, 2007). Some twitter users are not only distributing information, but also creating new content. This proves a shift in cultural consumption, where people are not only readers, but also distributors and producers (Manovich, 2009). The power of social media is actually in the hands of regular users, who are always connected, retweeting, posting new content, and generating conversations.

This discussion addresses the following research question presented by this study: *What is the nature of the relationships between brands and the public on Twitter?* The results of this research showed that the relationships between brands and the public on Twitter are constructed mainly by sharing information. The creation of brand identities is being supported by Twitter through the power of word-of-mouth. The results of this study showed that the majority of tweets are informational (84.5%) and that companies with a larger number of followers are more often retweeted, supporting the potential of Twitter as a content-sharing option (Morrisey, 2010). The nature of the relationship between brands and the public on Twitter is sharing and spreading information.

In order to make the word-of-mouth strategy work, a company has to be often retweeted by followers. This study showed that companies that have more followers are more retweeted and thus have the potential to reach new audiences. In that sense, to develop a strong word-of-mouth strategy, companies need to have a sufficient number of followers. The “Promotional” theme showed that the companies, particularly local companies, promote contests, events, and give out prizes as a strategy to generate traffic to their websites and make users become interested in following the company (Morrisey, 2010). The companies that had the highest percentage of promotional tweets were KMUW (11%), *The Wichita Eagle* (8.5%), and CNN (7.8%). Two of these three companies were local media sources and had fewer followers (*The*



*Wichita Eagle* had 3,000 followers and KMUW had 1,000 followers). Promotional tweets intend to engage current followers and have the potential to bring users to the company's website, perhaps even generating new followers if the promotion is mentioned on users' timelines. The third theme found in this research, "Conversational", indicated that companies also post tweets that are designed to engage followers in conversations. The number of tweets in this theme is smaller (6.1%) than the number in the "Informational" and "Promotional" themes, but all the companies researched for this study had tweets that fell under this theme. The local companies, especially *The Wichita Eagle* and KAKE News, had a higher percentage of tweets in this category than did the national companies (*The Wichita Eagle* 22%, and KAKE News 14.7%). Efforts by local news media companies to create relationships with their followers through interaction with them on Twitter, specifically replying to follower tweets and asking for personal opinions, offered the potential for more dynamic, two-way interaction, between media companies and their followers. In contrast, national news media companies analyzed generated fewer conversations with their audiences. This result at the local level can be explained by the fact that the de-territorialization brought by the Internet and electronic media are at the same time stimulating the reconstruction of social bonds and a sense of community (Lévy, 1997). National media have not yet embraced this opportunity.

The discussion of the results of the three main themes found in this study leads to an answer for the research question: *How are news media companies which historically use traditional media (newspaper, radio, television, etc.) for branding, using social media to create relationships with their consumers?* Twitter is a tool for information sharing which has the potential to support social bonds between users and news media companies. These relationships are in their early stages of development, as companies begin integrating the use of Twitter and

other social media platforms as part of their branding strategies. Three approaches seem promising: information sharing (Informational theme), promoting marketing strategies (Promotional theme), and enabling conversations (Conversational theme). Twitter is used by the companies studied to spread news, bring traffic to their website or marketing campaign, and interact with followers who can assist media companies in spreading information. These branding strategies have the potential to be developed using social interaction on social media as part of a strategy to build and support company identity. This identity is constantly evolving according to the image that the audience has of the company and the company's culture. This new way for companies to relate to their audiences could shape the way society is organized and the way people communicate. Social media are rearranging the way brands are built because the public has a voice that can influence this process.

According to the literature reviewed, a brand establishes a relationship between companies and consumers (Tavares, 1998) while brand equity gives value to the brand by establishing brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and branding associations (Aaker, 1996). According to Kotler and Keller (2006), the process of increasing brand equity can be facilitated by investing in research, advertising, and customer service. Today customers are connected to brands as active partners that are at the same time connected to a network of other customers (Thurau et al., 2010). And companies use Twitter to develop social brands and enable the power of word-of-mouth strategies that are connected to branding strategies in other media (Morrisey, 2010).

This study supports the discussion of the potential of social brands to be developed on Twitter through social processes with the goal of building an organizational identity. According to Lévy (1997), the constant redefinition of identities now takes place through interactions in an

international cyberspace, which can be seen as social media. Twitter is a tool for the propagation of ideas, formation of social bonds, and viral marketing (Huberman et al., 2008). The themes and subthemes developed by this research show that the local and national news media companies analyzed are, to some extent, using Twitter to spread information, utilize viral marketing, and enable conversations with users. This discussion supports the hypothesis presented by this study: *News media companies that are present on Twitter tend to use an organizational identity strategy for branding more often than a corporate identity strategy to relate to their target audiences.* Poster (1995) predicted that the way identities are constructed would change with electronic mediated systems of communication. The second trend of branding, presented by Hatch and Schultz (2002), develops this view by explaining how organizational identities are now being built. This study supports the discussion that the construction of organizational identities can be supported by Twitter for 3 main reasons: (1) In this model the organizational culture is open and available to anyone interested (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). This availability is present on Twitter due to the easy access to information; (2) organizational identity in this model is built through a flow process that is constantly impacted by situations or necessity. The organizational identity is constantly evolving through social interactions with stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Social media and Twitter are built upon social interactions online with the dissemination of information; (3) an organizational identity is built in a social context outside of the company and is capable of change (Hall & Gay, 2003). Twitter is a public social context where the audience has a voice and can interact with the company.

Twitter is a social media tool used by social media leaders (Webster, 2010) and the companies that were researched for this study have the potential to use this tool to develop relationships with their audiences by sharing information and listening to them. Their presence

on Twitter supports that the media companies studied are engaged in new forms of interaction with their audiences that have the potential to impact their branding. News media companies present on Twitter are developing their relationships with stakeholders outside traditional media. These companies represent traditional media (newspaper, radio, and television) but they are clearly capable of changing and evolving their brands to include more social components through the use of social media tools.

To illustrate this study and the potential model that news media companies could use to build organizational identities with the influence of the audience on Twitter, the three themes found in this study were applied to the organizational identity model. Organizational identity is a flow process that is constantly evolving. The identities of the news media companies can be expressed by the dissemination of primarily informational tweets. The companies could engage in conversations with followers and promote interesting subjects to them in order to reflect a desired image of their followers. The identity in an organizational model is constantly being built and refined. Identity building strategies could include social media as part of a process of constant reconstruction of identity with the influence of the audience. The culture reflects the identities of companies and the identities express their cultures. The use of social media to develop and maintain the identities of companies can also affect other branding strategies, as for example, traditional paid advertising. This model represents the potential of social media to help companies in the development of organizational identities.

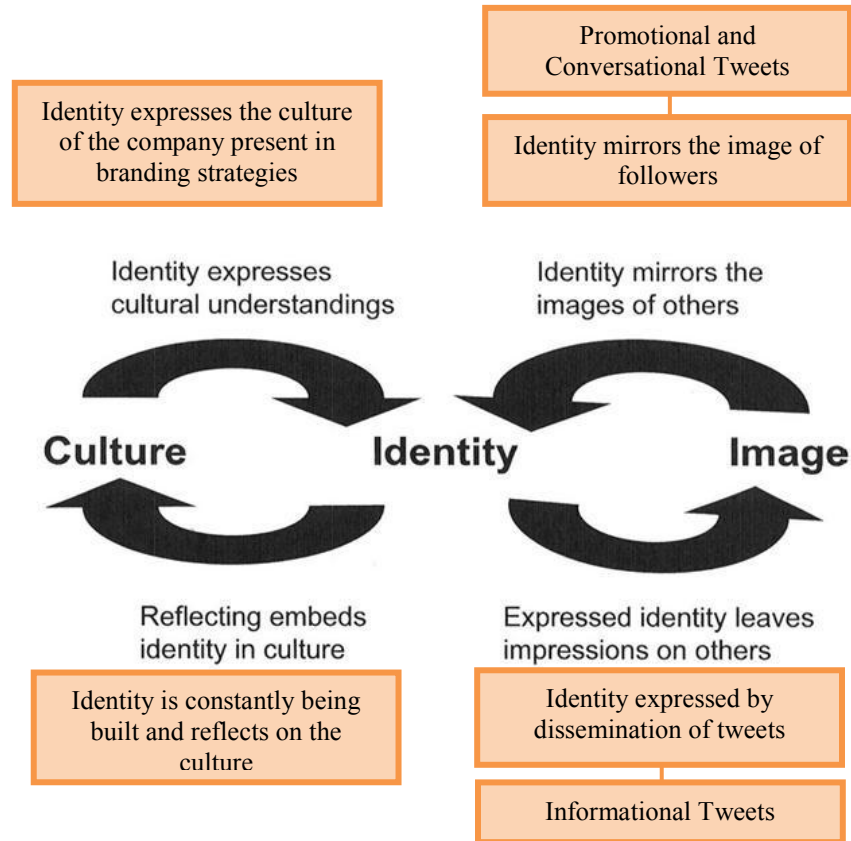


Figure 4. The organizational identity dynamics model adapted.

This discussion is also relevant when the national and the local companies studied in this project are compared. The results of this research showed that the national companies, *The New York Times*, CNN, and NPR, had a larger number of followers than the local companies, *The Wichita Eagle*, KAKE News, and KMUW. This result is expected, since the national companies have a larger potential audience to draw from than the local companies. But the other difference found between these companies was that the national companies posted mainly informational tweets, while local companies also posted Promotional and Conversational tweets. Local companies also mentioned, replied, and retweeted other users more than national companies did. These results indicated that the local companies are more interactive with their audience on

Twitter. Local news media companies specifically engage users more than national companies do, as for example this tweet posted by KAKE News on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011:

“@ACMSsMrT We're having no problems keeping up, just prioritizing what goes up on on-air ticker vs. website.  
in reply to  
This is bad when an info source cant keep up with info RT @KAKEnews: Due to large no. of closings/cancellations, we're limiting closings...”

As in this example, local companies replied to tweets posted by specific users, and also retweeted users that were not reporters or other news media sources. They also asked followers to contribute information, pictures, videos, and opinions, as for example this tweet posted by The Wichita Eagle on February 8<sup>th</sup>: “Wanted: Your snow photos. We may publish one on the front page of tomorrow's Eagle! <http://bit.ly/gqQ3bG#ksstorms#wichita>”. In this sense, local companies were more interactive with their followers on Twitter than national companies.

In contrast with these results, the national companies were more often retweeted by their followers than the local companies. Each tweet posted by *The New York Times* was retweeted 36.1 times, CNN 71.1 times, and NPR 22.4 times. But the results for the local companies were different. For each tweet posted *The Wichita Eagle* was retweeted 0.7 times, KAKE News 1.1 times, and KMUW only 0.2 times. These results could be expected, since the national companies have more followers than the local companies. And by comparing the number of retweets per follower for each company, the local companies actually had higher results than the national companies. While *The New York Times* and CNN had 0.003 retweets per follower, *The Wichita Eagle* and KAKE News had 0.03 and 0.02 retweets per follower, respectively. NPR and KMUW both had 0.01 retweet per follower. In summary, the national companies have more followers and were retweeted more often; while for all companies, a majority of their tweets were informational, the local companies were more interactive with their followers on Twitter. These

results support that all companies use Twitter to spread their information, while local companies are more willing to listen and engage in conversations on Twitter. All six companies analyzed have the potential to establish organizational presences on Twitter. The results show that the identities of national companies are more advanced through Twitter by follower retweets, because these companies have a larger audience. But the local companies, with a smaller audience, have higher numbers of retweets per follower. In that sense the local companies are being more frequently retweeted when the size of their audience is considered. Local companies studied engage in more interactive approaches that have the potential to impact their identities among audience members in a way that more collaboratively engages audiences in building and maintaining their identities. To illustrate, Figure 5 represents the organizational identity model showing which processes are currently utilized by the national or local companies analyzed.

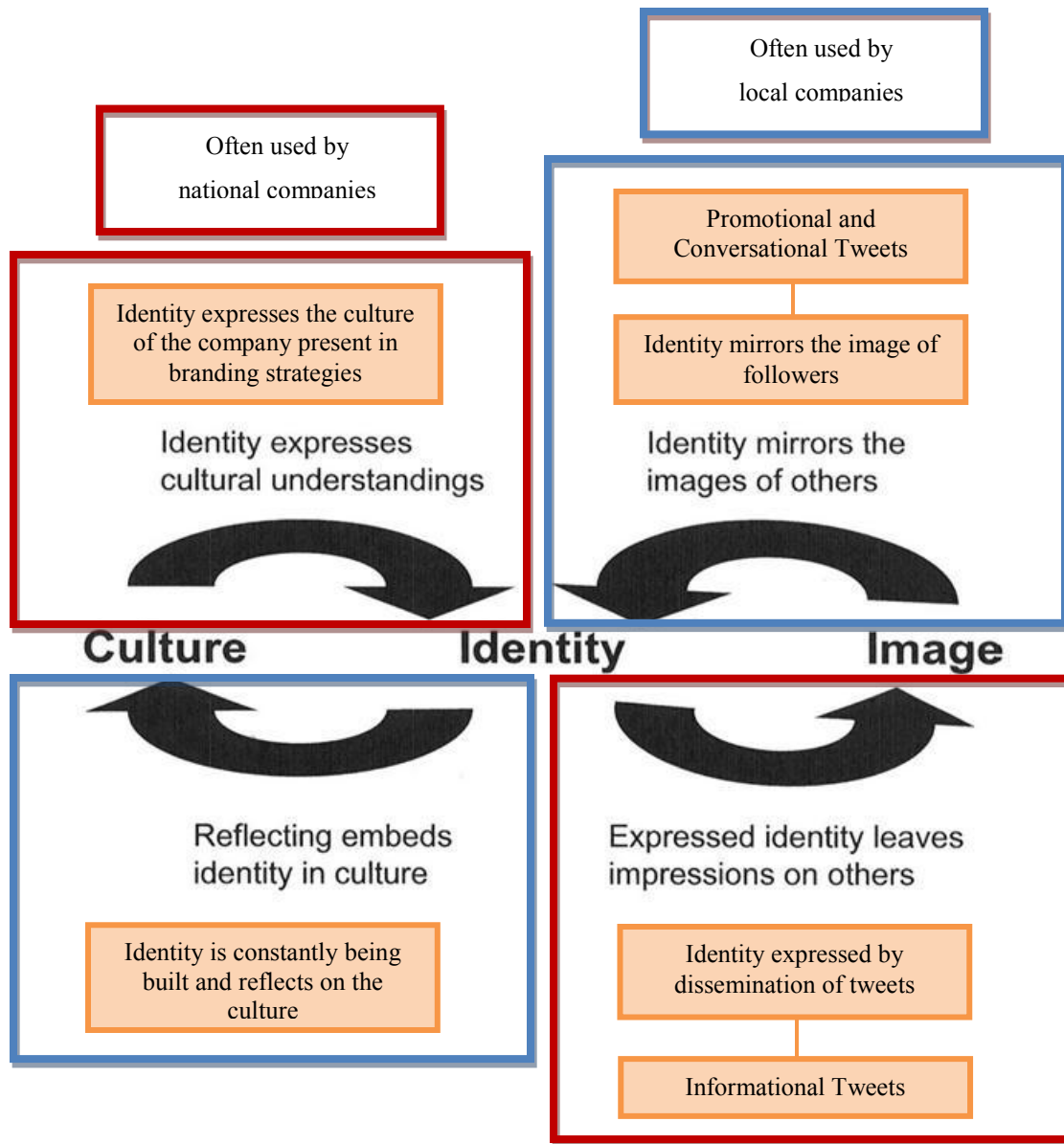


Figure 5. The organizational identity dynamics model used by national and local companies.

## 5.1 Conclusion

This thesis studied news media companies present on Twitter and related their strategies to media theory, social media premises, and branding strategies. This study concluded that news media companies are using social media to share information, promote marketing strategies, and enable conversations with their audiences. These strategies help the companies to build and



evolve their identities through social processes. National news media companies have more followers and their posts are retweeted more times. But the majority of these posts are informational with a link to their main website. Local companies have fewer followers and are retweeted less often, but these companies have a higher rate of retweets per follower, since their audience is smaller. While also posting predominantly informational tweets, local companies also post more promotional tweets and those that generate conversations with users, strategies that have the potential to enhance social bonds and a sense of interactivity among followers.

Social media present companies with the possibility of listening to the audience and spreading information easily and for free through word-of-mouth. Even though the results showed that the minority of tweets actually corresponded to conversations between companies and users, the retweets and the information posted on a public domain by a news media source stimulate conversations.

This new form of spreading news has the potential to change the way society organizes and spreads information, and the ways company identities are constructed. The audience has the power to gather information and share what is relevant to them. This brings a challenge for news media companies that need to stimulate the process of information sharing and give out information for free. This study showed that news media companies could face this challenge by constructing and maintaining an organizational identity through social processes that involve the audience.

This study reveals relevant results regarding potential branding practices for news media companies on Twitter, but it has some limitations. The limitations of this study are that it researched only six news media companies and analyzed only tweets posted by those companies, and not by the audience. Follow-up studies could research other news companies to evaluate

whether themes and subthemes found in this study are applicable to other news media companies and other social media platforms as a way to begin development of a theory of the information dissemination through social media. Also, tweets posted by these companies could be tracked to evaluate the extent to which they stimulate conversations after they are retweeted by followers, and how far a tweet can go in terms of being retweeted again by other followers of that user that retweeted the company. This would complement this study by further developing understanding of the role of the audience in the information dissemination process. And, because this study analyzes company practices on Twitter from a communication perspective, a business approach could be developed, complementing this study with a commercial analysis.

This thesis developed new knowledge by illuminating how local and national news media companies interact with their audiences on Twitter. It is pioneer in researching the implications of news media company engagement on social media and the resulting potential of this engagement to impact their brands. Considering that media shapes society, this study is relevant to understanding the communication process and potential of social media. It developed new knowledge about new media that is shaping our society on the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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