@WeReaders: A Case Study of Twitter as a Student Survey Instrument

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WeReaders @ Pratt

Introduction

The study explored reading practices of college students in New York City.

In the context of a larger study, Twitter was used to collect information about participating students' academic tasks and device preferences

Methods

The @WeReaders account collected data from Sept. to Dec. 2013; the account is still active

Participants were recruited through posted Tweets, institutional mailing lists

Tweets were scheduled 1-2 times daily

Twitter best practices, @ Replies and Retweets (RT), were used to invite interaction and increase the account's social capital (Solomon, 2013; Morris 2012)

Questions about student reading and study habits reflected themes and language of the larger study, modified for the conversational tone of Twitter

Tweets with survey prompts included links to other data collection instruments (survey)

RT of answers built the account's authenticity and modeled desired responses

Examples of Tweets

QUESTION
"Good morning #collegestudents! What are you working on this weekend? Reply @WeReaders to tell us."

RT ANSWER
"Q: Do you do homework on e-reader/device? A: RT @MS I own an iPad and I do most of my reading and draft writing on it!"

INCENTIVE TWEET
"First 10 people to tweet 5x about reading habits in 2 wks will win $5 amazon gift card! just use hashtag #weReaders or reply @WeReaders"

CONTENT
"The @nypl has a photo booth- to capture how people are reading and using the #library. Neat! http://ow.ly/q9hEi #nyc"

SURVEY PROMPT
"Studying? Doing homework? Help us research #college reading habits by taking a short survey here: ow.ly/pjOOF"
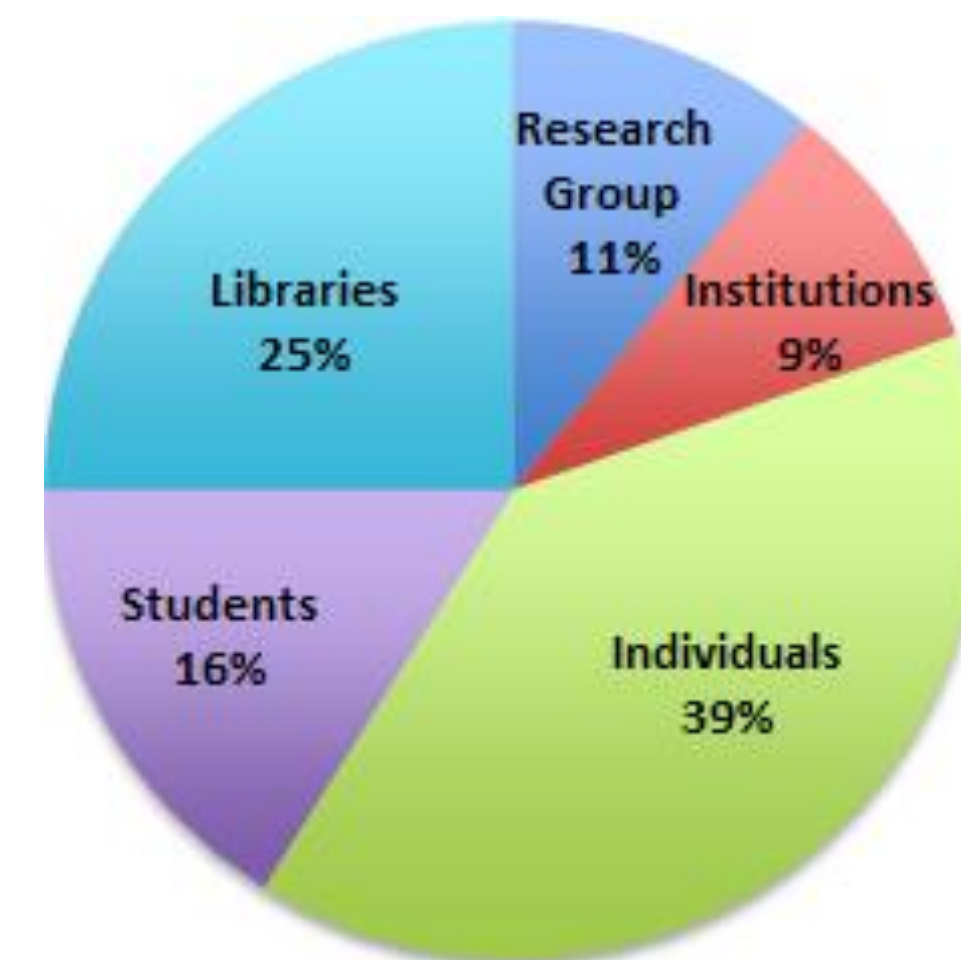
Twitter Use

Interactions with specific Tweets, and Users' public profile information were used to assess the reach of the account.

Of the 147 Tweets posted during the initial data collection, 27 total Tweets received RP interaction, consistent with the relatively lower interaction rates for newer Twitter accounts (Morris, 2012) or the levels of participation by students in classroom-based Twitter activities (Gao et al 2012).

RP Responses posted as Twitter @Replies addressed similar themes of academic task and device use and preference to RP responses in other data collection instruments. Further work will compare the content of RP @Replies from the Twitter account to data gathered elsewhere in the survey.

Twitter Account Followers

- Research Group 11%
- Institutions 9%
- Libraries 25%
- Students 16%
- Individuals 39%
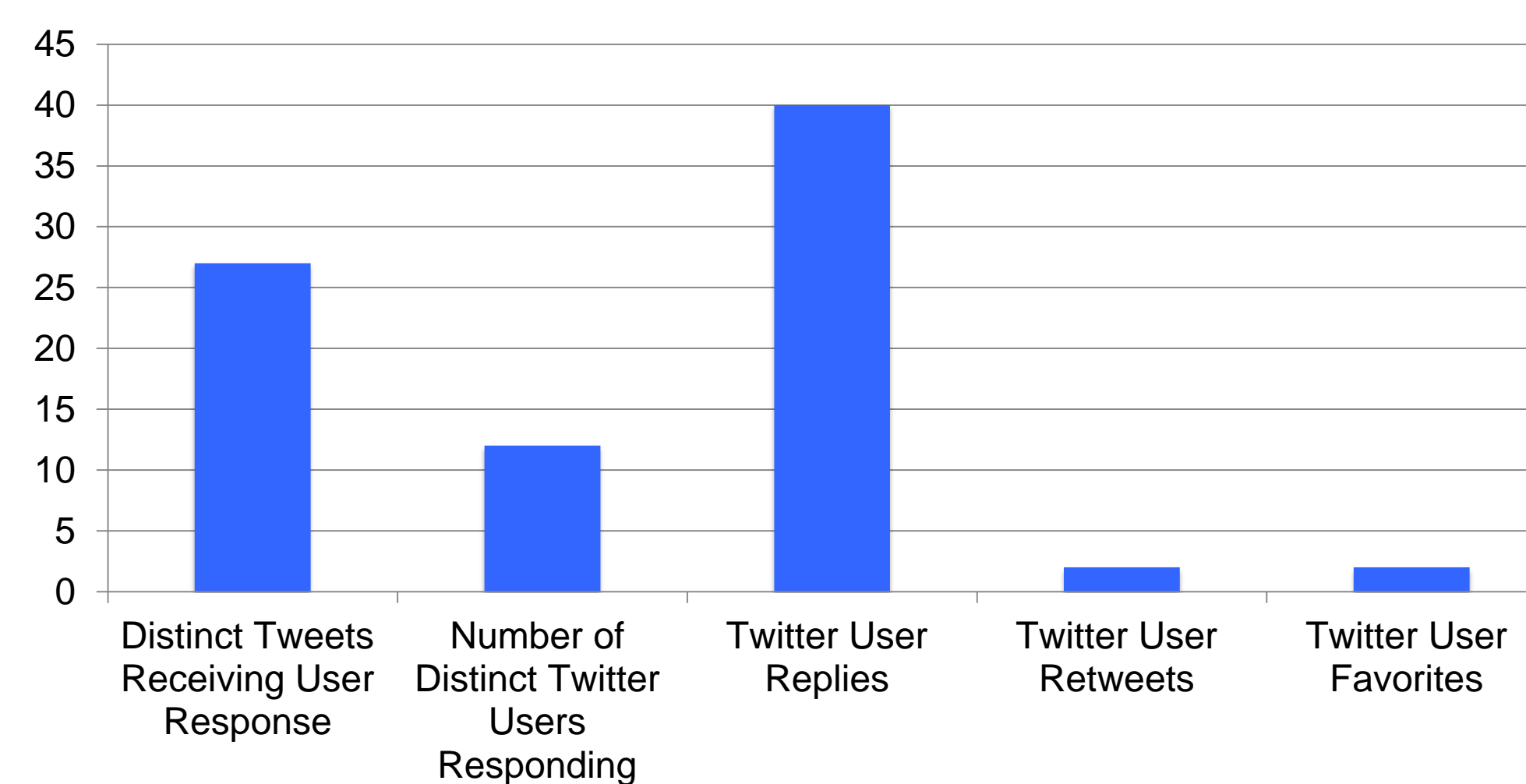
Measures of Tweet Interactions

References
Gao, F., Luo, T., & Zhang, K. (2012). Tweeting for learning: A critical analysis of research on microblogging in education published in 2008–2011. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 43*(5), 783-801. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2012.01357.x
Morris, M. R., Counts, S., Roseway, A., Hoff, A., & Schwarz, J. (2012). Tweeting is believing?: Understanding microblog credibility perceptions. Proceedings of the ACM 2012 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work, 441-450.
Solomon, L. (2013). The librarian's nitty-gritty guide to social media. Chicago:, Ill: American Library Association

Reading Themes in Twitter Responses

Content analysis of RP @Replies was coded for indicators of academic tasks and choice between print & digital resources

Academic task	Print/Digital /P&D/Other	Total
Reading (skimming, deep reading, annotating)	2/12/2/5	25
Writing (composing original material)	0/1/1/1	3
Workstyle (environment, habit, schedule preference)		6
Task Unclear	0	3
Searching	0/2/0/0	2

Print or Digital Resource in Academic Tasks

Reading was mentioned in RP Tweets more often than other academic tasks across Print, Digital and Unspecified Media. Digital resource use was reported more often than Print media across all tasks, including its exclusive use for Search tasks. In Reading, Writing, and combined Reading/Writing tasks, Digital media were used more often than Print.

Replies describing student work style, study habits and preferences, such as reading during the commute or studying while listening to music, illustrate conversational engagement and rapport with the @WeReaders Twitter account and provide a clearer picture of student preferences and behaviors in their academic tasks.

Conclusions

Strengths

The instantaneous nature of Twitter enabled collecting real-time reports on students academic tasks and reading preferences

RP expressions of preference for study habits, timing and setting, unique to the data collected from Twitter User RPs helped build rapport by capitalizing on the conversational nature of Twitter and enriched understanding of factors that influence student choice of print or digital resources relative to academic tasks.

Responses gathered in Tweets echoed some of the themes of the larger study (e.g. distribution of academic tasks and reading resources and media)

Weaknesses

The @WeReaders account did not collect many responses from RP, consistent with literature about student participation in instructor-led social media

While a high number of followers is key to establishing an account's credibility and authenticity, the process of amassing engaged followers can be time-consuming