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# How do consumers perceive brand campaigns on Twitter?

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**Abstract.** Brands use microblogs like Twitter to launch hashtag campaigns. The efficacy of using this medium (Twitter) for crisis communication is well established, while little is known about its influence on brand engagement. In this exploratory study, we use medium theory and medium richness theory to highlight the fact that cultural differences and the medium of communication play a huge role in information diffusion. Comparing hashtag campaigns created during POST-COVID using text mining methods, we find that an international campaign had more brand related discussions when compared to Indian brands. Future research needs to delineate the constructs that influence these differences.

**Keywords:** Hashtag campaigns, COVID, Topic Models.

## 1 Introduction

Twitter is a American social networking service that brands use to connect to consumers through tweets (messages). The platform is highly suitable for rapid information dissemination. Therefore, it is very useful in crisis communication. The platform is also highly suitable for generating conversations on topical or cause related issues [1].

Consequently, brands usually create “hashtag campaigns” to increase brand buzz. For example, Amazon Prime used “#Comicstaan” leveraged the platform for creating awareness of the launch of their stand-up comedy competitive series. Uber India “#LoveMovesForward” to celebrate the Supreme Court’s judgement that was of interest to the LGBTQ+ community. Despite its popularity, there are very studies that examine the effect of Twitter hashtag campaigns on generating brand engagement. Based on medium theory and previous research we believe that Twitter is not a suitable platform for engaging with consumers. Culturally, Indians prefer rich media and therefore prefer platforms like Instagram or Facebook.

In this study, we conduct an exploratory study to compare consumer responses to hashtag campaigns created on Twitter by Indian and international brands during COVID (Coronavirus disease 2019). Specifically, we address the following research question:

RQ1: Does consumer buzz differ for Indian and international hashtag brand campaigns related to COVID?

We believe that answering this question would foster further research ‘what is the utility of Twitter to create brand buzz?’.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Medium, Culture and Twitter**

“The medium is the message” is the cornerstone of medium theory [2]. This theory posits that the nature of the medium plays a key role in the subsequent engagement with the message transmitted [3]. Stakeholders respond in different ways based on the nature of the medium chosen for communication. The nature of Twitter is extremely suitable for crisis communication as it facilitates instantaneous reactions and responses from organization [4]. Brands use Twitter for viral marketing and invest in content diffusion. Influencers and opinion leaders who are on Twitter help in achieving this goal [5].

Cultural differences are also important in the usage of a medium. Users from collectivistic cultures use social media for social relationships [6]. They also differ in the way they react to messages on social media. For example, a user in a low context culture may feel comfortable responding to a political leader on Twitter vis-à-vis the one in a high context culture [7]. While tweets are restricted to 280 characters for most languages, audio and video tweets are limited to 140 seconds for most users. Twitter is therefore more suitable for short text communication and is inadequate for handling rich media (image, video) content [8]. Users in collectivistic , high context culture based countries typically prefer rich medium [9]. Thus, they may not exhibit a preference to engage on Twitter.

In this study, we add to these investigations by exploring the suitability of using Twitter for topical brand related campaigns.

### **2.2 Twitter Hashtag Campaigns**

Twitter hashtags allow users to identify topics that are of personal interest. They are also help in creating ad hoc topics when they want to focus on specific issues [10]. These tags are followed by a group of people who seek information on trending topics in politics (e.g. Arab Spring) , or movements like “Black Lives Matter” [11]. There are very few studies that examine the effect of brand related hashtag campaigns. Recent studies show that users tend to react to influencers’ tweets about a cause related brand campaign rather than to the actual issue [12]. Users can also form brand communities that have unique interests relating to the brand [13]. We believe that this study will add to this growing body of literature.

### **3 Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Data**

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Hashtag campaigns associated with COVID were chosen for analysis. Three Indian and one international brand were chosen. Details are as follows:

HUL & UNICEF's #BreakTheChain: This campaign was launched to inform and empower the general public about Covid-19 and its preventive measures like social distancing and hand washing.

Savlon's #ChainOfProtection: Savlon rolled out this initiative on World hand hygiene day to increase adherence to hand hygiene amid Covid-19.

Nike's #PlayInside and #PlayForTheWorld were released by Nike to increase awareness about social distancing and still play inside your home during Covid-19.

Tata tea's #JaagoRe #BadonKeLiye: This is an initiative by Tata Tea for specific social causes, and recently it has been aimed for elderly by partnering with HelpAge India.

The tweets were collected for 3 weeks post the launch-date of the campaign.

#### **3.2 Data Analysis**

Keyword plots and word clouds were used to display the top keywords. We used Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) technique to identify the underlying keywords grouped as a random set of topics in a collection. Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) is a particularly popular method for fitting a topic model. The words in the dataset were cleaned and pre-processed by removing the stop words, links and punctuations.

### **4 Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Key Words Plot**

This refers to the top 15 unique words which are most frequently used in the tweets. This is also done to see if all the keywords are relevant to the marketing campaigns or whether the hashtag was used for different reasons.

#### **4.2 Word Cloud**

As a next step, a word cloud was created (Figure 2), which is a visual representation of the data using the unique words. Nike's campaign comparatively has more brand coherent words when compared to the other campaigns.

#### **4.3 Topic Modelling by LDA**

The topics found by LDA were identified and named according to the common characteristics of the words present under that particular topic (Figure 3). All the Indian campaigns contained around two topics. HUL's campaign was related to UNICEF (as intended) and the associated words that were generic to COVID. Similarly, Tata tea's topic were connected to the elderly and medical aid for them. However, Savlon's

campaign did not contain distinct topics. The international nature of Nike’s campaign was showcased in the variety of the topics generated. Football clubs(BARCA/USLM) , National Athletic association (National Collegiate Athletic Association) were associated with the #playinside campaign.

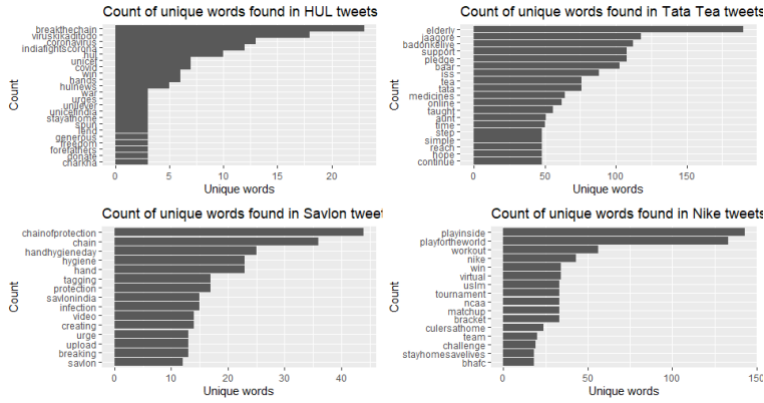


Figure 1 Keyword plots



Figure 2 Word cloud of campaigns



Fig. 3. Topic models for the data

The campaign run by HUL and UNICEF, #Breakthechain is also used by Kerala's state government and also randomly by people to address the breaking of covid-19's chain in their tweets. Thus, most of the tweets with this hashtag, are not relevant to the specific brand campaign. Savlon's competitor brand Dettol was one of the most used words of the campaign. No other competitor's name was seen in keywords which suggests that the Dettol and Savlon are often viewed as similar brands by consumers. Tweet key words were related to Tata's brand, its product like Tata tea, tata tea gold etc., which means that the users value its brand and connect to it. Some key words were also related to the target audience like "age", "elderly", "senior" etc, which means it was clear among the users that the campaign is targeted at senior citizens.

Unlike the Indian campaigns, Nike's campaign had many keywords related to the community spirit, like "teammike", "club" etc. which shows that Nike has done a great job creating a community of its own. Tweets also had the famous tagline of the brand "just do it" which suggests how consumers are well aware of the brand's tagline and its values. The campaign also had keywords related to exercises and workouts, particularly running, which means that the consumers see Nike as a fitness brand and relate to it running and other exercises. The theme of playing indoors was also adopted by a number of football clubs and athletics associations indicating that it was well received.

## 5 Conclusion

Our study shows that medium is an important component that decides audience engagement. We find that topical brand hashtag campaigns from Indian brands relating to COVID did not foster engagement or diffusion when compared to International brand campaign. Our findings highlight the fact that brand managers should consider cultural differences and the nature of the medium before launching a

campaign on social media. Future studies can extend this exploratory work and investigate specific effects in detail.

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