Analysing the Role of Twitter as Informational Source

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Abstract

With the rising usage of technology and internet, social media has become a grand phenomenon in the field of providing information, with Twitter being a major player in the game. The study aims to find out how people rely on Twitter as a trustworthy informational source. With social media being on such a rise in terms of popularity, this study aims to understand where Twitter stands amongst the other social media platforms. A survey of 500 people was conducted for this study. A set of questions was randomly circulated across social media platforms. The study was conducted in Delhi-NCR and included responses from people of diversified age, professional backgrounds, societies and opinions. The research in the said field started in 2007, after which substantial research was conducted on Twitter and its effectiveness as an information provider till around 2010. Although following that not much research has taken place. After an adequate hiatus, researches were resumed in 2015 and has been a matter of conversation till 2017. But studies conducted after that has been few. In conclusion, this study is to understand to what extent can Twitter be considered as a valid and trustworthy informational source. Information is of the primary essence in today's world and social media, alongside newspapers and TV, has played a considerable part in providing the masses with information. Twitter being a humongous part of social media has turned out to be a primary source of providing information in today's world.

Keywords: *Twitter, Informational source, Information, Survey*

Introduction

Introduced by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Noah Glass, Biz Stone on 21 March 2006, Twitter through its own form of messaging known as "Tweets" took the world by storm. It paved the groundwork for communication at rates that was considered unimaginable. Twitter has changed the algorithm of how people make conversation. Twitter currently has over 330 million users with over 500 tweets daily. It has one of the most diversified groups of users and a very open-ended approach. Several organizations use it as a means of advertising. Celebrities often use it as a means of publicity and humor. Along with this comes several comments and personal opinions on political acts, sports, personality, etc.

At its roots, Twitter was an application made for phones that is used to create and share small messages called "tweets." This was based on the concept of SMS which, back then, consisted of 140 characters that was increased to 280 characters in the year 2017. However, around this time these were termed as "micro-blogging." The conversation pattern in Twitter allowed the users to have a non-simultaneous conversation with one another performed by using several hyperlinks such as „#" or „@".

Social media & journalism have quite a complicated history. At times social media has proven itself to

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be quite reliable in terms of information, but at other times, it has been used by many as a means to spread rumors and false information, thus creating a different set of issues over the ones already in hand. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have proven themselves to be a behemoth in terms of information and communication in the society. People often relies on these in hopes of getting a side of a certain story that media and journalist often fails to or are not allowed to publish. However, it must be noted that the "other side" of the story, as referred, has often proven to be false/altered/abbreviated.

Twitter, being such a big part of social media, has often been used by journalists to report on certain breaking news. The irrevocable form of conversation has provided a more informal means of communication and information sharing. More so is the "re-tweeting" feature, which allows a user to re-post someone else's post, with acknowledgment of the post's original creator. Twitter has turned out to be a very challenging platform as every tweet can be put to question by several other users, to which the tweeter has to have an answer for.

Re-tweet has become a major forerunner when it comes to providing information or circulating a certain message. Once a message is tweeted, the re-tweet feature allows that same message to be circulated by other users, and thus it reaches a wider network of audience. Hence, the message that once was under the radar of 100 people can reach 10,000 and even more users at a time. This has been very helpful over the years when it comes to raising awareness, formal protest, opinions, etc. Apart from it, certain brands and corporations have gained new visibility as a result of their marketing and Public Relations (PR), which has skyrocketed from a small group of people to a larger group in a very short period of time. Furthermore, re-tweets

helps to circulate certain messages and information that media either chooses not to or are not allowed to share with the masses.

Twitter has helped bring the world under one umbrella. Any incident that takes place around the world, no matter how unoriginal or important, is tweeted by a user and is often turned into a global phenomenon. Twitter's user-friendly approach and features have shaped the concept of global communication. Its influence on the field of marketing is revolutionary as it has allowed several organizations to make their marketing strategies way more interactive and diversified, which in turn has also allowed it to reach a wider margin of audience. Information, ideas, publicity, etc. on Twitter has often reflected to be in a more profound level. The affects Twitter is having on media and society as a provider of information is, therefore, the primary study of this research article.

Review of Literature

Ever since its launch in 2006, Twitter has crossed countless bounds in the field of social media. With a bare minimum of 140 characters, people all over the world can share their thoughts, emotions, messages through text, and often through graphics (images/videos), thus, bringing it closer to the Internet (7 things, 2007).

As unlikely as it may seem, the concept of social media is not a new one. As Coyle and Vaughn (2008) said, it is basically a medium to link an individual to one another, through their personally convenient means of communication, such as computer, locality, ideas, experience, etc.

Coyle and Vaughn (2008) realized the changes people are going through in terms of forming a relationship. The pathway to a relationship in the 21st century is very different than its predecessors. Now, relationships are formed more than often in

the online method rather than the traditional offline method.

The evolution in communication through social media has, in some respects, brought us much closer to our friends and family. Like even when there's a distance gap between two people they can look up their social media profile at times to see how is he/she holding up. It has enhanced certain ways of being part of a relationship, as it helps us in being in touch with people who might be physically beyond our reach (Taylor, 2008).

As social media enhances its reach in the field of communication, it is evident that individuals are not the only ones looking to connect via the Internet or social media. Many organizations and notable industries around the globe have also been trying to extend their field of work via social media (Wilson, 2009).

Even in the field of healthcare and medication, social media has proven to useful. Throughout the world, several doctors have been connecting with their patients for immediate medical attention, or at times are even holding private meetings on social media to understand their patients better (Hawn, 2009).

In the field of education as well, social media has brought upon the concept of community learning, student collaboration, and online classes, which shows that it has the capacity to reach far and wide and has the potentiality to enhance the education experience (Barbour & Plough, 2009). The concept of education through social media is being used by students at schools and colleges at a growing scale, as certain information which might often get missed in class can be dug up again through social media (Quan-Haase, 2008).

The near simultaneous method of conversation on Twitter, or on most social media platforms for that matter, is what makes conversation through social media such a wholesome affair. In the field of communication hierarchy, the instant messaging (IM) has its certain near undisputed place and it remains intact to the point where it feels, at times, the conversation is "talking" rather than "texting" (Jacob, 2008).

The concept of a short message encourages quick conversation, and also brings in a fast pace conversation. It can be looked upon as a messaging application for an arguable ever increasing group of masses. It keeps the tone of the message short, simple, and casual which often helps in evoking certain emotions to the context (Church, 2008).

What makes Twitter such an appealing experience is the fact that people get to create communities of their loved ones. They have the opportunity to follow one another, keep tabs on one another, and be updated on their health issues, should there be any complications (7 Things, 2009).

The 140 characters word limit is appreciated by its users as it provides them with an opportunity to be more concise, and the message is more focused on the subject matter. With the fast evolving world, it really comes in handy to some people as they can just stumble upon some news, and be on with it, without having to sit and read through the entire thing to get an understanding of it (Jacques, 2009).

Though twitter's short messaging style is appreciated by many, it has its fair share of negative criticisms, as often people have to write an elaborate solution to certain problems. It often gets tedious trying to make one's point and also craft it to be as per the word limitations. Hence, one has to work really hard on their vocabulary and sentence construction (Jacques, 2009).

One of the most fascinating aspects of Twitter is the usage of hash-tags „#". This allows a user to look

for a certain ongoing event, a protest, a movement, a fund raiser, etc. All a user must do is use a „#" before their tweet and it has the potential to become a really important subject-matter. The usage of this „#" is often for supporting a certain individual or a group of people, or for a certain demand, etc. (Johnson, 2009).

An interesting feature of Twitter is that one doesn't need to have any sort of personal connection to a certain individual in order to get to know him. One can simply follow the said individual based on their similar choices, actions, and pursuits and be updated of their daily lives. This feature is heavily used by fans of different genres to show their support and admiration towards their favorite actor, sportsperson, singer, etc. (Bell & Kuon, 2009).

Twitter has been a pinion in the field of social media ever since its creation in 2006. This is mainly due to its widespread users from a commoner to a celebrity. With controversial, supportive, triggering, funny tweets from all sorts of people, it has become the playground of online interaction (Farhi, 2009).

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to understand how Twitter has turned out to be a quintessential part of providing information to the masses.

Research method: Research method constitutes every technique and strategies used in order to conduct a certain research. It is the understanding of how a research is conducted. It is a form of systematic investigation of a particular topic. It is a step by step process of learning about a particular topic and getting to know it better. It is done by explaining certain problems and their solution, collecting data, evaluation of data, suitable conclusions, etc. It aims to figure out certain facts which have not been given much concern over the years and dig for the truth behind them.

Research design: The data collected for this research is based on the survey method. A set of questions were circulated and conclusions were drown based on the said survey. A total of 500 responses were collected, which consisted of people of all age, gender, and economic status.

Area of Study: The said survey was conducted in Delhi NCR, where the questionnaire was circulated among random people. A simple random sampling technique was used to accomplish a more appropriate set of responses.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

- Out of the 500 respondents, 60.40% were female and 39.60% were male (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Gender of respondents
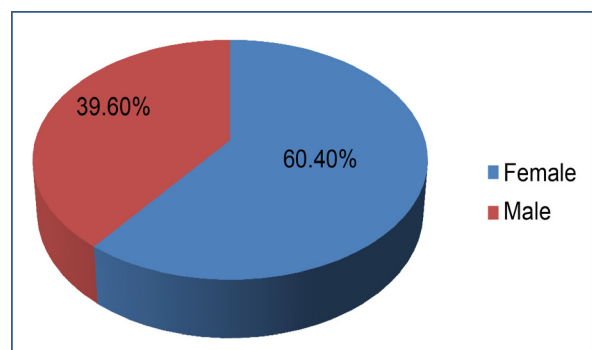
- The responses showed that people between the age group of 18–25 years have a certain knack for Twitter, having constituted 43.40%. This is followed by a higher age group of people (i.e. 26–35 years), having shown a certain interest in Twitter and constituting 29.20%. The rest of the age groups (i.e., below 17 years, 35–45 years, and above 45 years) have a similar interest in Twitter, which is comparatively low (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Age of respondents**
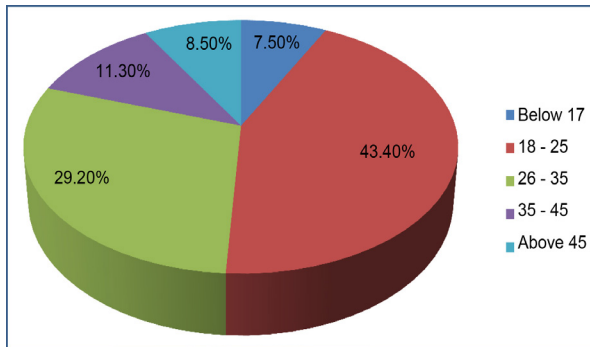
- The responses show that postgraduate students form the majority group using Twitter with a share of 43.40%. This is followed by undergraduate students who have shown a considerable interest in Twitter with a 35.80% share of the total tally. Although 12th standard students have shown a certain presence in Twitter with 17% share, PhD students have barely any presence on Twitter (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Qualification of respondents
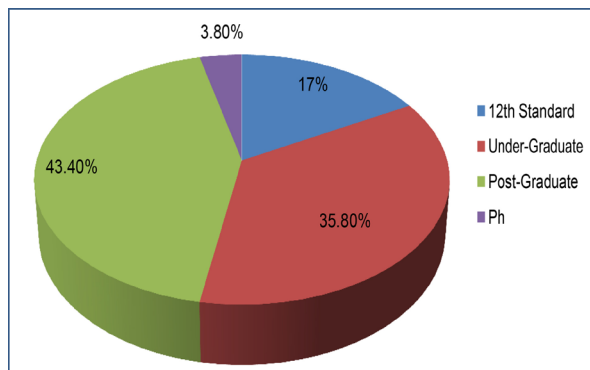
- The survey showed that most people have been using Twitter for 2–4 years (35.80%), followed by a group of people who have been using it for 0–1 year (30.20%). This is followed by a group of people who have been using it for 4–6 years (18.90%) and a group of people who have been using it for 6–8 years (15.10%), which are comparatively lower than the previous two groups (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Longevity of people on Twitter
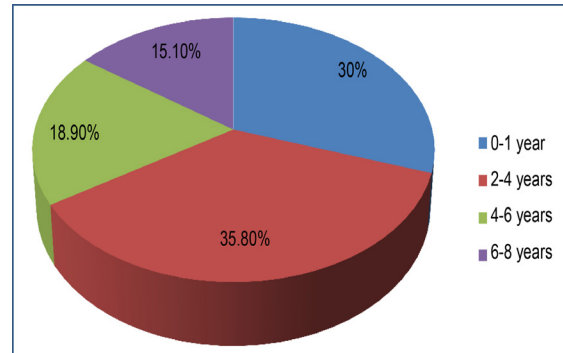
- Figure 5 depicts how active people are on Twitter on an average on the basis of a scale of 1 to 5. The activeness of people on Twitter is the highest at level 3, with a 28.30%, which is followed by a group of people who barely uses Twitter (level 1), i.e., 22.60%.

**Figure 5: Level of being active on Twitter**
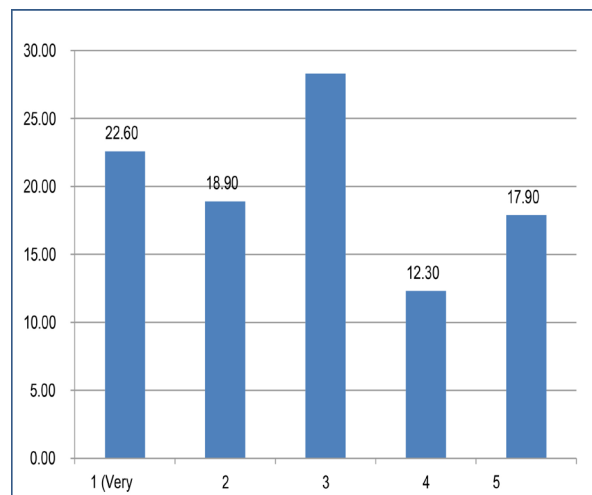
- Most Twitter users follow politicians the with a share of 33%. This is followed by movie stars with 29.20% share. Followers of musicians/ dancers and sportsperson come next with 17.90% and 15.10% of share, respectively, followed by the rest such as memes, science projects, etc. (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Most followed group of people on Twitter
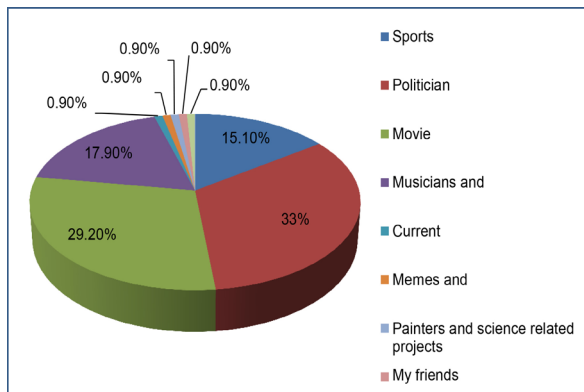
- A majority 32.10% of people are into what is trending on Twitter, which is followed by political updates at 28.30%. This is closely followed by celebrity gossips at 22.60% and sports at 15.10%, with other streams such as science and daily news at a minimum 1% (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Types of news mostly looked up by respondents**
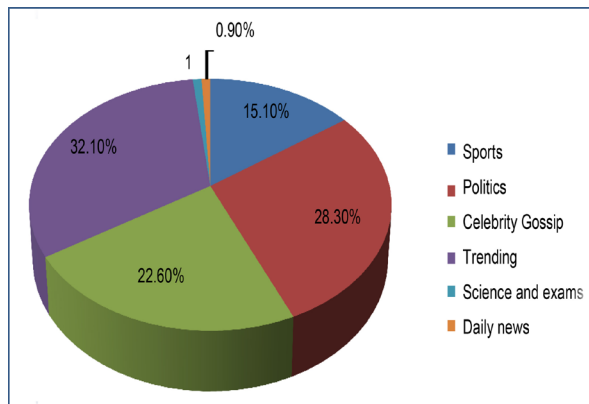
- The data showed that 62.30% of people are on a neutral level in terms of Twitter providing them with accurate information. While 25.50% of people are convinced that Twitter provides them with correct information, 11.30% of people have no faith in the information provided on Twitter. As less as 1% of people believe that sometimes the information provided could be accurate (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Respondents on Twitter providing accurate information
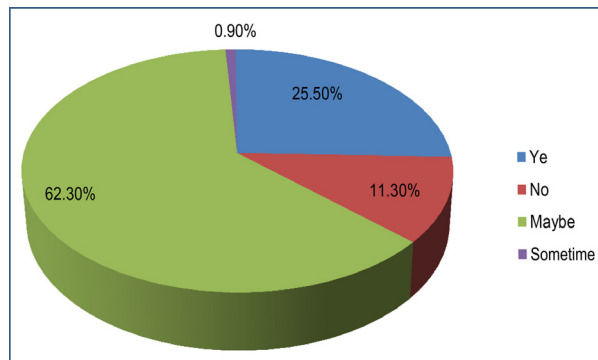
- In terms of people's opinion on Twitter providing better information than other social media platforms, on a scale of 1 to 5, level 3 that promotes neutral opinion tops with 40.60% of votes. This is followed by level 4 on the scale at 33% which includes people choosing Twitter over other social media platforms. This is followed by a lesser group of people at level 5 with 14.20% who considers Twitter as the best platform for receiving information in comparison to other social media platforms. Level 1 and level 2 at 1.90% and 10.40%, respectively, are towards the bottom (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Respondents on Twitter fairing over other social media platforms in providing information
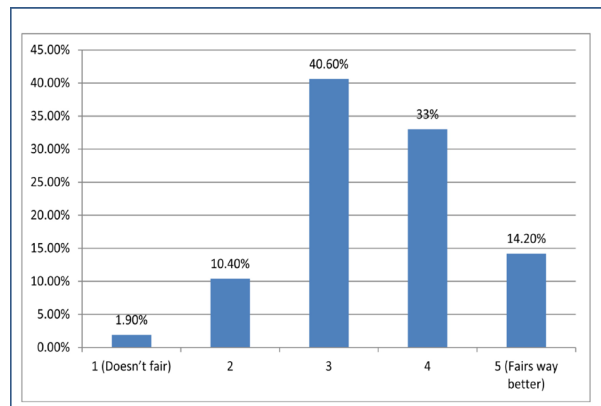
- The data shows that 63.20% of posts on Twitter are about personal opinions, followed by a

long margin by self-promotions at 15.10%. This is closely followed by Jokes at 12.30%. Organizations are at 6.60%, which is followed by fan letters at 2.80% (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Most tweets from respondents
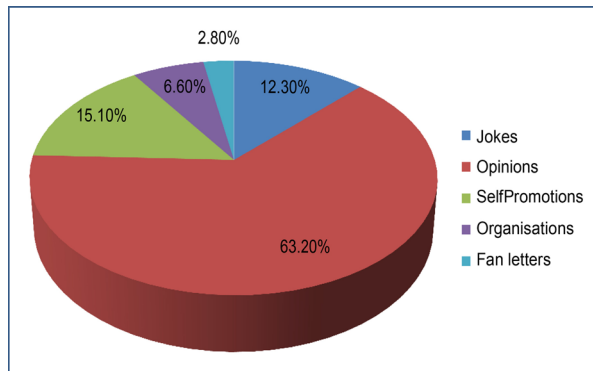
- Figure 11 depicts that 34.9% people read tweets and information on an average basis. This is followed by 19.8% people who always read every tweet. This group is followed by two groups at 17.9%, i.e., people who often reads a tweet and a group who barely ever reads a tweet or information. Lastly, we have 9.4% of people who almost never read any tweets or information.

Figure 11: Scale of respondents reading tweets
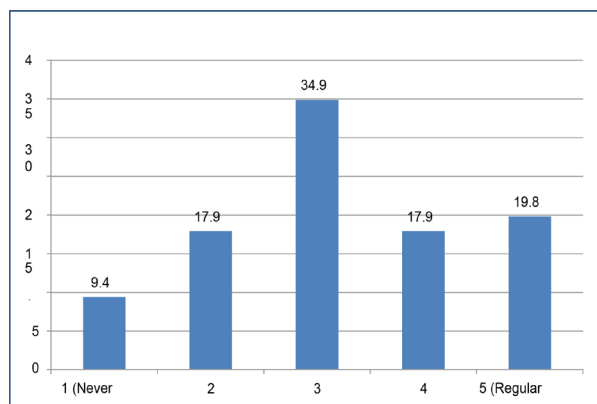
- Figure 12 shows that 36.80% of people re-tweet a post only when they find it appealing

to them, followed by 28.30% of people who re-tweet when they have an idea about an already posted tweet. This is followed by people who re-tweet as a form of spreading awareness regarding a certain matter or issue (19.80%) and people who re-tweet as a form of validation of a certain information (14.20%). Only 0.90% of people have never re-tweeted anything. This goes to show that users, for the most part, re-tweets based on certain norms. Nevertheless, re-tweeting has been considered an effective means of circulating information among the masses.

**Figure 12: Factors affecting respondents to re-tweet**
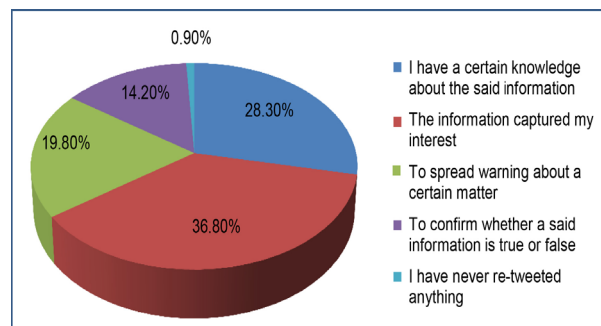
- Figure 13 shows that 33% of re-tweets are mostly information-based, 24.50% are based on news items, 17% are mostly memes and parody, 13.20% are based on unusual incidents, 11.30% are mostly based on tweets by celebrities, and the remaining 0.9% are none of these and are assumed to be personal. This goes to show that users have considered re-tweeting to be an effective means of circulating certain news and information. Although they might have their personal and varied reasons, it all answers to the same cause.

Figure 13: The parameters on which re-tweets are based
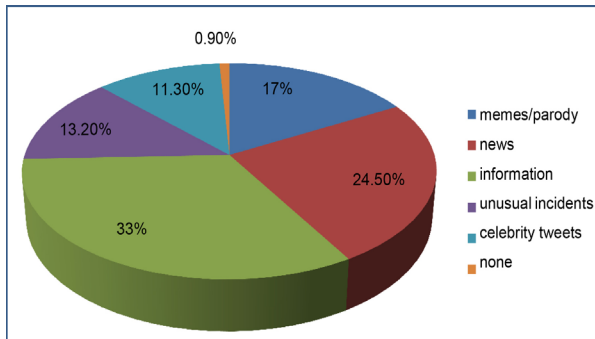
- The data showed that 45.30% of people are on a neutral zone in terms of considering Twitter as the most important social media platform in terms of information, while 28.30% of people heavily implies Twitter as the most important social media platform in terms of information. This is followed by 26.40% of people who don't believe Twitter to be the most important social media platform (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Respondents on Twitter as the most informational social media platform
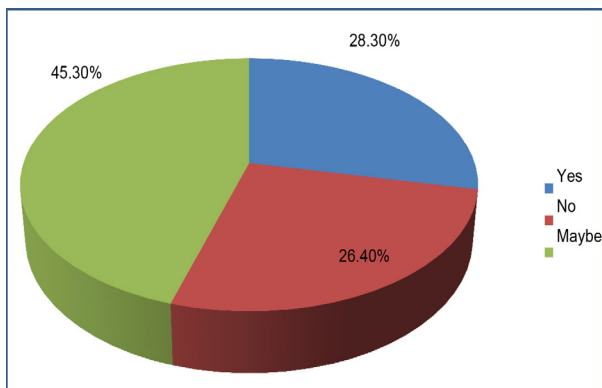
- Figure 15 shows that 55% of users try and create an awareness through a tweet of their own after receiving a false information, letting people know that the said tweet is misleading or incorrect; 30% of the people let their near and dear ones know of such a message; 14% users try and do their best by writing about the false

information in the comments section; and only 1% of the people don't take any action during such a scenario. This goes to show that people trust Twitter when it comes to obtaining correct information. Furthermore, any chance of a false message being circulated is mostly eliminated or people are made aware of it.

Figure 15: Respondents' reaction upon receiving wrong information
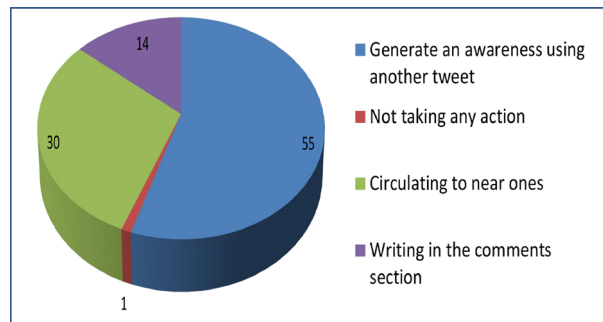
- The data showed that 39.60% people believe that the information received via Twitter is correct on an average, while 26.40% people believe that they are mostly correct; 16% believe that they are always correct; 15.10% believe that they are rarely correct; and 2.80% believe that they are mostly never correct (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Responders on accuracy of information received via Twitter
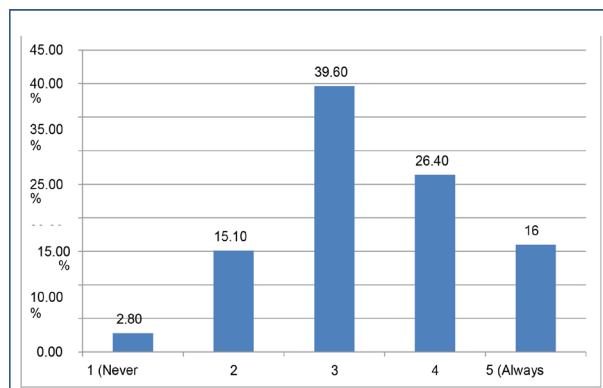
- The last question of the survey revealed that 51.90% people consider Twitter to be the most

trustworthy social media platform, followed by 39.60% of people who have neutral feelings towards this opinion, and 8.50% people who strongly disagrees to it (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Respondents' trust on Twitter
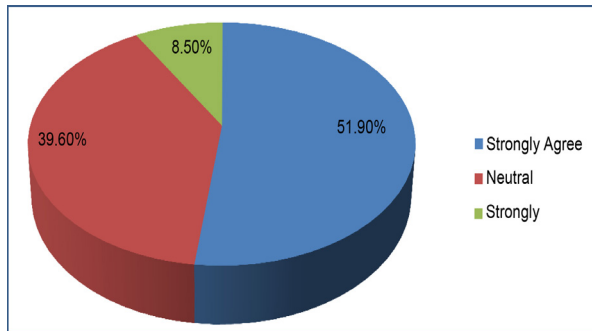
Analysis of the Objectives

To study how Twitter has turned out to be a quintessential part of information sharing network

The main objective of this research was to get an outlook of people on Twitter and to understand to what extent is Twitter useful as a source of information to the common masses. Furthermore, it was meant to get an idea about what category of people mostly use Twitter and what people mostly seek to achieve from Twitter. In a world where social media has become such a vital aspect of information gathering, Twitter has been recognized as quite a reliable means of information. The unsynchronized method of conversation provided by Twitter opens up a lot of space for a thoughtful, yet a very informal mode of conversation, which enables anyone to understand it irrespective of their professional background. Twitter has become a worldwide phenomenon with its user-friendly mode of communication. People of all classes and professional backgrounds have found their way in Twitter. Celebrities such as movie stars often post incidences of their daily life and opinions on a subject-matter, updates about upcoming projects, and so on. Companies use Twitter as a means of

promoting their products. The general public use it for several reasons such as for uploading memes and parodies, sharing opinions, raising a voice against something that displeases them, and so on. Furthermore, the re-tweet option allows the user to re-post a certain article that might have appealed to their interest, or a certain post that seemed important enough to be circulated among a larger group of audience. Twitter has also been the ground for self-promotion of several self-employed people. On a much lighter side, people get to follow their favorite personalities, such as actors and sportspersons, keeping tabs on their daily updates. The hashtag „#‟ feature that Twitter provides has turned out to be one of the primary tools of information distribution. A hashtag-based comment or post has the potentiality to even start a movement and help create support for the needy. It can also make a certain news article or information receive a great deal of attention and importance from the masses. Even certain news channels use Twitter as a means of news publication, thus making the news we receive more reliable. The vast ground Twitter covers in terms of providing information is what helped it become such a popular social media platform. People often rely on Twitter to see the other side of a certain story, which is often overlooked by media. The younger audience over the years have shown their utmost faith in Twitter as a credible source of receiving information.

Conclusion

Based on the survey conducted for this research, it can be stated that Twitter is one of the most trustworthy social media platforms in terms of providing information. However, there is still a considerably large group of people who are still hesitant to be completely driven towards the concept and have mixed feelings towards it. The survey showed that the young generation has really accustomed themselves with Twitter and often look

for certain information through it. A certain knack of raising one's voice/opinion regarding a certain topic has also been noticed. Twitter has been chosen as a more trustworthy platform over several over social media platforms. Furthermore, it has often been used as a ground to check the credibility of a certain news items. Though there is still some debate regarding the accuracy of the information one receives on Twitter, it would be fair to say that ever since its inception in 2006, Twitter with each passing day, as users tend to lean towards it, is turning out to be the most essential means of gaining information on social media.

Limitations of the study

The survey has certain limitations. Often people tend to fill up a survey form carelessly. The answers are often convenience-based and hardly any effort is put into while answering a certain question. At times, people don't wish to share their personal information such as age and qualification.

Scope for future studies

Due to certain limitations as mentioned above, certain questions were not explored to their full potential:

- What type of tweets do you re-tweet the most?

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how often you read tweets and information?

These questions remain open for further research.

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