

TWITTER IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN MEGACHURCHES: AN EXAMINATION OF
THE SOCIAL MEDIA'S EFFECTIVENESS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study identified what Twitter followers were discussing in reference to the top five megachurches in size. The methods utilized within this study involved an examination of all tweets hashtagging the top five megachurches over a sixteen day timeframe. The first research question was answered by categorizing tweets into predetermined content categories. This study also addressed the second research question by determining if Twitter implementation was beneficial in executing the missions of the top five megachurches. This question was answered by analyzing tweets using a five point Likert scale measuring how reflective each tweet was to the mission statement of each of the Top five megachurches. Ultimately, this study revealed that hashtagged tweets did reflect topics that are beneficial to each individual church's growth, however, tweets hashtagging the top three megachurches did not reflect the mission statements of each church. Therefore, this study concluded that Twitter implementation is beneficial to church growth because followers discuss topics relevant to the success of the church, however, Twitter may not be the most suitable social media platform for megachurches in their attempts to execute their mission statements.

This thesis is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for giving me this thesis idea and for helping me to complete the study in the midst of numerous other obligations. Without your presence and strength, I could not have completed this study, so again, thank you!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the social media network, Twitter sent Claire Díaz Ortiz, leader of social innovation for Twitter Inc. to network at the Catalyst Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose of the Catalyst Conference was to unite young ministry leaders from churches of all sizes to learn innovative approaches to ministry that would replace outdated and ineffective approaches (Catalyst, 2011).

Twitter's decision to involve religious leaders of megachurches with the social network was a strategic decision. For instance, this decision took place soon after Google removed churches from their non-profit program and after Apple® removed applications from Exodus International and the Manhattan Declaration as a result of protesters uniting against the two groups' views on homosexuality (Bailey, 2011). Therefore, it appears as if reaching out to church populations during this time gave Twitter an advantage. This study will focus on megachurch leaders that decided to implement Twitter within their ministries.

Megachurch Defined

The term megachurch is often defined as a Protestant Christian congregation with at least 2,000 weekly attendees (Babb, 2008; Goh, 2008; Thumma, 2008). There is no predetermined religious denomination for megachurches. In fact, megachurches have a variety of practiced doctrine, languages, racial compositions, brand images, and socioeconomic statuses (Goh, 2008). Typically, megachurches are composed of a more youthful congregation within the age range of 20 to 40 but the larger the megachurch is, the wider the range of church demographics (Goh, 2008; Finigan, 2013). Megachurches have been noted as evangelical in nature and active in engaging younger, technologically savvy individuals (Baab, 2008); therefore religious leaders

have taken advantage of using social media to connect congregants and fellow followers to the gospel and/or their church.

Historical Background of Megachurches. Historically, traditional Protestant churches maintained smaller congregations, contrary to present day evangelical megachurches (Robinson, 2008). Robinson (2008) suggested that megachurches can be traced back to the tradition of having revivals in the frontiers during the 18th and 19th centuries. These meetings served as worship and church services that were eventually relocated indoors (Robinson, 2008). Over time, meeting house structures grew to accommodate growing congregations and adhere to church principles (Robinson, 2008). However, megachurches differ in their modern non-denominational structure (Robinson, 2008). Thumman (2008) suggests that there are many myths about megachurches because they are misunderstood and do not maintain traditional church structures. There has been a shift away from theology, heavily influenced by Lutheran and Protestant principles (Robinson, 2008). A concern with this present shift away from traditional church is the idea that the majority of church attendees will flock to megachurches, thus leaving smaller mainline churches (Robinson, 2008). However, Thumman (2008) and Walton (2011) suggest the benefits associated with megachurches such as modernization and appeal to people who don't attend church far outweigh concerns (Walton, 2011). Megachurches have also steered away from broadcasting sermons on television and now rely on their private websites to broadcast sermons via video live streaming and embedded video files. Megachurches have fully evolved from small meeting houses to campuses that provide services and resources for the entire family; however, adversity still remains (Walton, 2011).

Megachurch Adversity. According to Wasiksi (2013), churches have traditionally refrained from incorporating social media within their ministries out of fear of removing focus off of the Gospel. However, as indicated in the previous section, these churches have a sizeable number of young people who are active members, and it would be reasonable to expect the use of social media as expansion tools for these ministries. The increase of the number of megachurches has led to some disputes amongst individuals who believe that megachurches have removed the honesty within church and replaced it with profit-driven motives (Goh, 2008). Church leaders initially refrained from using social media networks because leaders had communication patterns that conflicted with social media's interactive and direct nature (Williamson, 2013). Wasiksi (2013) mentioned that previous church structures did not participate in dialogue through social media or two-way communication, congregants simply listened to their leader preach a sermon. However, with a growing number of young adults attending these churches, it is fair to argue that social influences may have encouraged the adoption of social media. When considering megachurches, the decision of whether to incorporate social media or refrain from using it may be highly socially influenced because many people utilize some form a social media throughout the day. Therefore, megachurches may feel obligated to adopt social media platforms such as Twitter in order to appeal to congregants. This reversal may have come about as a result of the increase in megachurches around the world.

Furthermore, as Karnes (2007) asserted, the increase in megachurches has altered praise and worship experiences from intimate chapel settings to large arena-sized churches with thousands of congregants. This shift in church size has led to a new set of communication strategies used to promote church unity and involvement in and out of the church walls. This

study addressed Twitter use as one of these new strategies to determine how it benefits the top five megachurches in size.

Top Five Megachurches. As of 2013, the top five megachurches in size within the United States were: (a) Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas with 43,500 average attendees, (b) North Point Ministries in Alpharetta, Georgia with 30,629 average attendees, (c) Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois with 25,743 average attendees, (d) NewSpring Church in Anderson, South Carolina with 23,055 average attendees, and, (e) Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama with 22,184 average attendees (Outreach, 2013).

Exponential growth of megachurches explains the reach and impact that these megachurches have within their communities and how they can use this reach to continue to expand their ministries. It is evident that in order to accommodate thousands of congregants, megachurches must implement new strategies for the purpose of connecting congregants to God outside of church. The uses of these strategies for religious purposes fall under the theoretical concept of Devotional-Promotional Communication, a two-way flow of communication between a clergy/communicant, congregant/devotee, and an object of devotion that results in a connection between all members involved in the interaction (Tilson, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

The paradigm under which this study is being undertaken is the “Devotional-Promotional Communication” model. This communication model may aim to “instill great love or loyalty, enthusiasm, or zeal for a particular religious individual, living or deceased, a faith-based institution, or a specific faith” (2004, Peck, p.83). It is useful to note how hashtagged tweets have a relational component as well as promotional features for megachurches. This model is inherent in new strategies utilized by megachurch leaders and church multimedia departments in terms of

how they interact with followers and congregants. Consequently, the study will examine hashtagged tweets in relation to the extent to which the Devotional-Promotional Communication is executed among megachurches.

Social Media Platform

Twitter is a social media platform aimed at connecting individuals through message posts that have a one hundred and forty character limit (Twitter, 2013). These message posts are called “tweets,” and all tweets can be viewed by followers on Twitter (Twitter, 2013). Twitter followers are individuals with subscriptions to someone’s Twitter account, and Followers are able to view any updates or tweets posted by the person they are subscribed to. Following someone on Twitter does not mean they will automatically follow in return; one must still send a following permission request (Twitter, 2013). If an account is not set as “private,” anyone can follow that account and view all tweets posted.

Twitter Functionality. Although the word “Twitter” may be a household name, not every person uses the technology for the same purpose or knows anything about its functionality. It is, therefore, important to shed some light on what the social media entails. Twitter is a social media platform that is relatively easy to adopt, by simply creating an account and begin to follow other members (Boyle, 2012). Twitter can then be accessed from most mobile phones as well as from any computer device with internet access (Boyle, 2012). Twitter functionality permits message dissemination to a vast number of individuals within the network as well as to non-members through a host of devices that include desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, desktop computers, mobile phones, and many other devices that are connected to the internet. As with any online communication platform, it is critical to understand key feature associated with the platform.

Twitter's Key Features. Twitter contains key features dedicated to trending topics or “Top 10” list of the number and time of tweets posted. The first is called hashtagging or posting a message preceded by a hashtag or pound sign (#) symbol (Twitter). Hashtagging a post places the words or phrase following the hashtag into a list of trending topics or trending key words and joins conversation around a common thread (Twitter). After a word or phrase is hashtagged, a link is created and when clicked, Twitter users can view all tweets that have hashtagged the same word or phrase. Within tweets, individuals also have the option of disclosing their current location while posting the tweet, and individuals can also re-tweet or repost another Twitter user's post. Similarly, Twitter offers a feature that uses the at or (@) sign before a user's account name which then creates a hyperlink of an individual's Twitter account being acknowledged. The (@) symbol connected to the Twitter user can be placed anywhere within the tweet, and when the hyperlinked user's account is clicked, it will connect to the user's Twitter account. One may utilize the (#) and (@) feature simultaneously and repetitiously as long as the message does not exceed one hundred and forty characters.

Twitter Users. Typically, celebrities, public figures, athletes, actors and other well-known individuals utilize Twitter for promotional and public relations purposes. These famous individuals allow thousands of followers to view their tweets which discuss their upcoming events and often their public appearance schedules. It is speculated that some famous people have public relations staff to tweet for them, but many do tweet themselves. Twitter usage by individuals such as athletes, musicians, actors and models has often correlated with controversy and inappropriate commentary but appealing tweets attract attention and many followers. Many famous public figures also encourage Twitter followers to interact with them by using the hashtag feature to develop a trending topic. Public figures tell their Twitter followers what to talk

about, think about, and read about by telling them what to hashtag (Fei, 2013). For example, celebrities may tweet a message post asking all of their followers to hashtag their favorite song or movie; this would then lead to hundreds or thousands of individuals' hashtagging a post as a result of being prompted by the public figure (Fei, 2013).

In addition to public figures influencing tweets posted by their followers, religious leaders have also taken part in this practice of telling their congregation to follow them on Twitter, or to hashtag a certain topic or idea discussed during church service. An example of Twitter adoption may be seen on the Pope's Twitter account. Twitter representatives worked with the Pope to strategize and determine how the Pope's current Twitter account may be recycled and used longitudinally for the next Pope. The Pope agreeing to maintain a Twitter account made an impact on Catholics globally by displaying approval of technological advances. Instances like this can be seen in the role Twitter plays with the top five megachurches due to the fact that all of their websites have a page or space dedicated to how individuals can and should connect with them on Twitter. This raises the two questions;

What exactly are followers tweeting about, and what is the tone of the content they are hashtagging?

These two questions pose an opportunity to investigate the hashtagged comments posted by Twitter followers of the top five megachurches.

Papacharissi (2012) noted the correlation between Twitter posts and how individuals feel a sense of connection to a topic, and that individuals with similar views tend to interact within the same networks. The result of interacting with one's Twitter community is being socially aware of conversations occurring within a network (Papacharissi, 2012). This sense of being socially aware and present is defined as presence or how authentic a mediated experience feels to

a media user. Therefore Twitter may enhance a sense of perceived presence amongst Twitter followers (Bracken, 2005). This perceived presence may enhance relationships and connections with individuals within the same network.

Megachurches and Twitter Implementation

Initially, many church officials were cautious in adopting social media within their ministries; however, after understanding the benefits involved, many eventually followed suit to refrain from being behind in technological advances (Wansinski, 2013; Boyle, 2012). As a result of Twitter highlighting the benefits of the social networking for churches, many religious leaders have devoted resources and manpower to create accounts on the social network for their congregations to interact outside of church (See Revehl, 2010; O’Leary, 2010; and Holmes, 2013). Many megachurches have embraced Twitter due to its ability to serve as a space for communication amongst congregants, as well as to build relationships (Webb, 2012). Church leaders now have the ability to broadcast messages to anyone who follows their page (Webb, 2012). The number of churches in the United States that have implemented this technology for their congregations is overwhelming. An example of how religious leaders now approach Twitter can be seen in Bishop T. D. Jakes’s multimedia page on his church’s website (Jakes). Jakes, Bishop over The Potter’s House, now has a page on his website dedicated to informing visitors on how they can invite family and friends to follow the ministry on Twitter. The page also explains how different Twitter links become direct messages to other Twitter subscribers when they click each link. These direct messages are invitations to attend church, listen to a recorded sermon, or follow the church on Twitter (Jakes).

As indicated earlier, Jakes is not the only ministry leader who has dedicated space on his church’s website for Twitter and other social media networks. The Willow Creek Church also

has a social media ribbon located at the bottom of the homepage for the purpose of encouraging website visitors to connect with the church via social media (see Appendix A). Almost all churches that have a web presence indicate that they are currently utilizing the social network as a means to expand their ministry. Each church promotes Twitter's integration differently depending on the site's graphical user interface but the underlying substance remains the same.

For instance, Lakewood Church, the largest mega church in United States of America since 2008, has a social media ribbon at the top of their homepage (see Appendix B). This social media ribbon directly connects website visitors to each of the church's social media pages. In addition to this social media ribbon, the Twitter emblem is displayed above the pastor's picture on the homepage and next to the Twitter icon is the quote of the day labeled as #TodaysWord (see Appendix B). This quote of the day is updated daily in conjunction with the Twitter page.

Rarely will one visit a megachurch's website and not see any of the major social media network icons. Churches have begun using social media platforms, such as Twitter, as tools and mediums to distribute news, maintain relationships, create portable cyber churches, and most importantly, evangelize (Wansinki, 2013; Boyle, 2012).

Is Twitter Effective to the Church's Mission?

There is no doubt that to many organizations Twitter serves as an important marketing and public relations tool. However, not all organizations have the same mission, and the usefulness of this social network in the context of megachurches is still unclear. Indeed, the network permits constant interaction between megachurches and their followers 24 hours a day, regardless of geographic location (Wirtz, 2013; Yust, 2010). But, like most organizations, churches have a goal or mission statement, and many have begun to use Twitter for the purpose of marketing their mission. However, there is a dearth of empirical evidence suggesting that the

implementation of Twitter in megachurch's ministries has any benefit to the mission of these churches (Webb, 2012). Certainly, one way to determine if efforts made by megachurches using Twitter will be beneficial to churches is to look at their mission statements and compare them with content categories, themes, and other key variables that will be identified in the investigation. All of the churches that will be used within this study have mission statements but as of February 2014, there are inconsistencies in the content and placement of the mission statements from the top five megachurches in order of size.

The following section contains mission statements from churches that are part of this investigation. It will be in light of these missions that the study will ascertain the usefulness of the social network through hashtagged posts or tweets.

Church Mission Statements

Lakewood Church. Lakewood Church does not specifically identify their mission statement on their private website, but their Twitter headline display reads, "Lakewood Church exists to share the miracle of unconditional love and unending hope found only in a relationship with Jesus Christ" (Lakewood, 2014).

North Point Church. The North Point Community Church's mission statement is consistent across their private website and their Twitter page, and it states that their mission is "to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ" (North Point, 2014).

Willow Creek Church. The Willow Creek mission statement reads, "Willow Creek exists to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ" (Willow Creek). Willow Creek's mission statement is listed on their personal website, but there is a different statement posted on their Twitter website and it reads: "Our doors are open to people from all backgrounds, regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey" (Willowcreek, 2014).

NewSpring Church. NewSpring’s mission statement states, “NewSpring Church exists to reach people far from God and teach them to follow Jesus step by step. We believe that growing people change, that we can’t do life alone, that saved people serve people, and that we can’t out give God and that found people find people. NewSpring Church has a passion to continue growing, impacting lives and using technology and the arts to reach 100,000 people for Jesus Christ” (NewSpring).

NewSpring’s Twitter page also states the first sentence of their mission statement: “NewSpring Church exists to reach people far from God and teach them how to follow Jesus step by step”.

Church of the Highlands. The purpose or mission statement of Church of the Highlands is, “To reach people with the life-giving message of Jesus that they might become fully devoted followers of Christ” (Highlands). The Church of the Highlands does not mention their mission’s statement anywhere on their Twitter page. After reviewing each megachurch’s mission statement, it would be beneficial to determine if Twitter implementation has aided each church in achieving their mission statements.

Problem Statement

There are minimal empirical research studies that examine Twitter’s effectiveness in assisting megachurches in carrying out their mission statements (Wirtz, 2013). There are also few studies that examine churches and microblogging, and churches and their internet use in general (Webb, 2012). Previous studies on Twitter have examined Twitter’s impact on non-profit organizations, politics, celebrities, and education (Wirtz, 2013). There are no scholarly studies available to help shed the light on whether implementing Twitter provides any benefits to churches. It has not been determined if implementing Twitter within a ministry provides various

benefits. For this reason, this study aims to ascertain or understand the nature of hashtagged Twitter posts acknowledging the top five largest megachurches in the United States of America as of 2013.

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it could provide critical information regarding ways in which churches may or may not use Twitter as a social media in conjunction to their mission statement. The information obtained from this study may be useful for pastors, seminary students, and organizations or institutions interested in how to utilize the social network effectively in order to advance ministry causes and missions. The study could also offer resourceful strategies to churches that may not already have knowledge of the Devotional-Promotional Communication model.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to ascertain the extent to which implementation of Twitter in megachurches contributes to the accomplishment of the ministries' mission statements and goals. Specifically, the study will analyze the nature of Twitter posts hashtagging the top five megachurches by size through Twitter's hashtag (#) feature. It is reasonable to suggest that one way to determine whether the technology contributes to the advancement of churches' missions is to analyze the content of hashtagged tweets on each church's website.

By the conclusion of this study, the content category, tone and mission statement relevance of each tweet will be identified. This study is being conducted because religious leaders are increasingly encouraging their congregations to interact with the church via Twitter

using the hashtag feature during services and outside of service. For this reason, the following research questions guided the focus of this study:

1. To what extent do the topics of conversation in hashtags by followers reflect topics that are beneficial to the churches' growth?
2. To what extent is Twitter implementation, as currently used, congruent with the megachurches' missions?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

After completing a thorough review of existing literature pertaining to megachurches, it was determined that there were no existing studies focused on Twitter and megachurches. For this reason, the proceeding review of literature will focus on devotional-promotional communication, values, framing, as well as previous studies that have utilized Twitter for content analyses.

Devotional-Promotional Communication

Devotional-Promotional communication is a two-way flow of communication that consists of a congregant or a devotee, a clergy member or a communicant, and an object of devotion (Tilson, 2006). For the purpose of this research, congregants may be compared to Twitter followers, communicants can be compared to ministry leaders, and the object of devotion is God (Tilson, 2006). The two-way flow of communication that occurs requires high levels of trust in order for effective communication to take place (Tilson, 2006). The Devotional-Promotional communication model describes how individuals may interact for the ultimate purpose of communicating with their object of devotion. (Tilson, 2006). An example of this model may displayed in how ministry leaders and Twitter followers interact through Twitter for the purpose of connecting to God.

For instance, if a ministry leader or communicant distributes a message to a Twitter follower or congregant, the intent behind that message would be relationship building for the purpose of connecting the congregant to God. For this reason, this model serves a larger purpose than just delivering a message; it ultimately aims to connect congregants to God. This model

may only appeal to people with a specific set of values and beliefs. Therefore it is useful to consider the values of individuals when attempting to use this communication model.

Values

Values may be defined as longstanding beliefs that influence behavior and interests (Brummett, 2013). Values may also be passed down through generations or acquired through social interactions throughout life (Brummett, 2013). When examining values, social influence may be considered because values are typically held by groups (Brummett, 2013). It is within these groups that values are maintained, encouraged, and reiterated. According to Brummett (2013) individuals have the ability to appeal to the values of groups for the purpose of influencing decision making and attitudes.

An example of a study that examined the influence of values focused on two films and their ability to impart and produce socially held values (Brummett, 2013). Both films examined within this study were classified as popular culture or socially accepted films. The plot and storyline of each film appealed to the interests and values upheld within popular culture. The goal of this study was to provide awareness on how films within popular culture have the ability to impact audiences by appealing to the values of popular culture (Brummett, 2013). A benefit associated with this study was its ability to shed light on how people can use media or concepts supported in popular culture and implement them within messages to influence people by appealing to their values. An example of a film appealing to values is one that imitates common life scenarios that individuals may relate with (Brummett, 2013). Examples of these films may include storylines about weddings, dating, jobs, and other common daily occurrences. This idea however, does not account for other films that gain popularity while reflecting fictitious life

experiences. Examples of fictitious popular culture films may include Superhero movies as well as some variations of digitally animated movies.

With Brummett's study on value appeal in mind, the connection between values and Devotional-Promotional communication may be examined. For instance, Devotional-Promotional Communication through Twitter may successfully impact the attitudes of Twitter followers of religious leaders by appealing to the values and beliefs of followers. Appealing to values may occur through posting inspirational quotes, scriptures, or positive messaging. Attempting to positively influence the attitudes of individuals by intentionally appealing to their values may be a form of message framing.

Framing

Message framing or framing describes how messages are shaped and constructed with intentions of distributing or displaying a certain message or idea. (Zoch; Collins; Sisco & Supa, 2008). This may take place through word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, and other writing techniques. Ministry leaders may implement framing within their Twitter posts by intentionally creating positive, spiritually focused messages for the purpose of appealing to the values of individuals.

An example of framing may be seen in a study led by Zoch et al. (2008) which examined the websites of activist organizations to determine if they implement framing within their message posts. The method selected for this study was a content analysis of posts on the organization's website and the purpose of the study was to determine how frequently Twitter posts displayed evidence of framing devices (Zoch et al., 2008). Within this study, researchers determined which activist organization websites they would examine by first identifying key topics of interest occurring within the timeframe of this study (Zoch et al., 2008). After

identifying those topics, the researchers compiled a total of thirty-two key topics of interest within nationally recognized news (Zoch et al., 2008). These thirty-two topics were then entered into a search engine and the search results produced thirty-two non-profit organizations that correlated with the topics of interest discussed (Zoch et al., 2008). Each non-profit selected supported each of the thirty-two topics and ultimately, ten were selected for this study (Zoch et al., 2008). All non-profits selected focused on advancing social or environmental issues and out of all 304 websites selected, only one page from each site was analyzed during this study (Zoch et al., 2008). Each analyzed page was selected by determining the page that website visitors would see first in their attempts to obtain more information about the cause and mission of the group and the content was coded by using framing devices such as content categories (Zoch et al., 2008). The five content categories or framing devices used were catch phrases, depictions, exemplars, metaphors, and visuals (Zoch et al., 2008). Coders then determined if the five categories for framing devices were displayed anywhere on the organization's website. Results from this study revealed that the most common framing device was 'organization as a solution', which describes the suggestive nature of the site in its attempt to state that being a part of the organization's movement was the solution to solving the problem associated with the topic of interest and on the non-profit's website (Zoch et al., 2008). Overall this study revealed that the non-profit organizations were not using framing devices on their websites to their advantage, ultimately missing opportunities to reach viewers of the website and those who may be in support of their cause (Zoch et al., 2008).

If constructed effectively, framing devices within messages may initiate interaction, effect emotions, and appeal to values. Within Devotional-Promotional Communication, the intent behind exchanged messages is to lead people to an object of devotion, or in this case, God.

Religious leaders with Twitter accounts have the ability to decide what others focus on within a distributed message (Zoch, 2008). Individuals can frame messages through using communication devices such as phrases and metaphors (Madigliani, 1989). In addition to Devotional-Promotional Communication, it is beneficial to consider prior research conducted using Twitter for alternative purposes.

Content Analyses

There has been some discussion on how Twitter usage is implemented within politics. For instance, a study conducted a content analysis of the twitter account pages of presidential candidates for the purpose of determining how candidates used and implemented Twitter during their campaigns, interact with followers, as well as determine how forth coming these candidates were on Twitter (Adams, n.d.). This study was conducted by completing a content analysis of tweets obtained from the Twitter account pages of political candidates over twenty-eight days (Adams, n.d.). A total of 605 tweets were analyzed from the Twitter pages of Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, and Barack Obama and these candidates were selected because all of these individuals were involved in campaigns in February 2012 (Adams, n.d.). After completing the content analysis, results revealed that a high amount of tweets posted by candidates were in reference to the economy, certain events taking place, and the primaries but there was no record of useful dialogue between the candidates and their followers (Adams, n.d.). Results from this study also determined that Barack Obama had the highest frequency of posted tweets out of all candidates. Barack Obama also tweeted double that of the other candidates and was the only candidate that exuded transparency by stating that he and his staff post tweets on his account to inform his followers that at times, he may not be the one posting on his account (Adams, n.d.). Lastly, it was determined that all candidates refrained from replying to tweets thus

avoiding two-way communication. Overall, this study determined the category with the highest amount of tweets was the ‘economy’ category which entailed unemployment, an array of budget information, as well as topics pertaining to taxes. After acknowledging the top categories these tweets identified with, the compiled results may implicate that the candidates typically posted messages to address economy topics versus using the platform as a means to express their views. The goal behind political studies was to determine how and if Twitter engagement correlated with winning a presidential election (Adams, n.d.).

An additional political study examined how congress and political figures used Twitter (Golbeck, n.d.). This study aimed to find out what kind of content members of the U.S. Congress posted on Twitter. In order to determine this, researchers examined content found within 6,000 Twitter posts. After completing the study, results revealed that members of Congress mainly use Twitter for message dissemination such as direct links to their personal blogs and for granting daily access to followers on the happenings in their lives (Golbeck, n.d.). Overall, this study displayed how Twitter is used as a promotional tool and in addition to serving as a promotional device, Twitter also serves as a space for direct interaction between Congress members and citizens (Golbeck, n.d.). This direct communication provides Congress members with the ability to be transparent with follower who have minimal access to them. With all of this in mind, Twitter removes disconnect between citizens and Congress and out of all tweets examined, over half of the posts were information related (Golbeck, n.d.). Unfortunately, it may be difficult to increase transparency between followers and the government and a challenge to inform followers on legislation matters due to the 140 character limitation enforced by Twitter. In conclusion, it was determined that Congress members use Twitter for personal recognition and for directing followers to information about them with minimal evidence of interacting with followers.

In addition to content analyses on political topics, health communicators also utilize content analysis when organizing health campaigns. Rui (2013) conducted a content analysis to determine if health organizations provide different forms of social support to patients through tweeting. The study revealed that health organizations have the ability to provide informational and instrumental support through tweets but not emotional support (Rui, 2013). In 2009, Jansen conducted a content analysis to uncover patterns and characteristics of marketing through Twitter to determine its effectiveness and brand recognition (Jansen, 2009). For instance, this study aimed to determine if microblogging could be seen as an electronic word-of-mouth approach for sharing brand opinions of consumers. The researchers used a case study to analyze the category type, frequency, time, and content contained within each tweet. The five brands selected for this study were Banana Republic, SMART, ForTwo, Wii Fit, Google, and Forever stamp. All brands used within this study were selected based on company reviews found in *Business Weeks's* Top Brands, BrandZ Top 100, and a few other branding sites. At completion of this study, it was determined that 19% of tweets acknowledged a brand and 20% of microblogs studied mentioned some view about a company. Overall, microblogging may support companies if implemented within their branding strategies. Consumers' decision to purchase certain brands appears to be influenced by comments posted through microblogging. Therefore utilizing microblogging was also said to increase customer and brand relationships due to its direct connect nature and features that provide real time responses.

Similar studies have also analyzed how journalists participate in microblogging through Twitter and serve as gatekeepers (Lasorsa, 2012). For example this study takes a similar approach by examining how microblogging journalists set the tone for journalistic norms and practice with Twitter. The subjects within this study were the top 500 most followed, and their

names were obtained from MuckRack.com, a website dedicated to keeping record of Twitter journalists and their area of expertise and new organization they work for. George Stephanopoulos was the journalist with the highest amount of followers, 1,224,118 at the time of this study. This study involved a content analysis of the first ten tweets posted daily within the time frame of 12:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. over a two week timeframe. Over 22, 000 tweets were analyzed and it was revealed that the journalist blogger are implementing Twitter norms and practices within their microblogs. For example, microblogs have become more opinion based. Using Twitter may also assist journalist with improving their credibility by making their webpages more transparent.

Members of organizations utilize social media platforms to build and maintain relationships (Ramanadhan, 2013). This study examined how Community-based organizations promote health through social media platforms as well as what content is posted and what interactive tools are used. This issue was addressed through the use of content analysis of 166 posts found on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In order to determine the usefulness of benefits associated with implementing Twitter or other social media platforms, organizations have conducted content analyses to quantify and analyze message posts to determine if they aid in relationship building (Ramanadhan, 2013). 16 CBO's were discovered, and 162 of them had websites. Out of these 162, only 70 organizations had a Facebook, YouTube, and/o Twitter presence. Within the study, 40 CBO's had a Twitter account and they had an average amount of 695 followers. 965 tweets were obtained over a 30-day period. It was also determined that a benefit Twitter allowed was the ability to exchange tweets with other followers. For instance, 21% of tweets were retweets and 38% included some form of reference to an organization while 37% of tweets contained a hashtag. Overall, just under 50% of CBO's simply disseminated

information versus encouraging active communication. It was determined that out of all of the social media networks, 'organization promotion' was the most frequently used type of tweet. The flow of communication was reported as predominantly unidirectional instead of two-way communication. A study conducted by Ramanadhan (2013) revealed that organizations tended to use at least one of the major social media platforms and among posts analyzed, it was revealed that promotions was the most consistent theme observed. It is also suggested that organizations update their Twitter accounts and Facebook accounts at similar rates (Ramanadhan, 2013). In addition to these findings, studies also revealed that using social media tools results in communication patterns that are unidirectional in nature (Ramanadhan, 2013). For instance, account holders send messages to followers however, the followers do not respond back. Therefore, this study proposed to increase interaction within social media (Ramanadhan, 2013).

Social Networking

Social networking may be defined as acquiring and developing relationships within virtual environments (Konetes & McKeague, 2011). Various social networking websites (SNS) serve as communities that permit the exchanging of ideas and conversations amongst people in different physical environments (Konetes & McKeague, 2011). This exchanging of ideas produces social ties which may then develop into social networks. Social networks grant participants the opportunity to develop relationships through mediated communication such as social media platforms. According to Coyle & Vaughn (2008), those who utilize the internet have larger networks than those who refrain from internet use. Typically, social networking sites aid in the maintenance of relationships between individuals who have previously met in person. Although face-to-face interaction provides more intimate interpersonal benefits than virtual interactions, both work harmoniously in the development and maintenance of relationships.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study reported the results of a content analysis of hashtagged tweets acquired from the top five megachurches in size as of 2013. Tweets were obtained for 16 days from August 4, 2013 to August 19, 2013. The purpose of this time frame was to examine content posted after three church services to determine if people typically hashtagged each church after church services. This time frame included two full weeks and an additional two days to account for all three church services. All tweets were also collected during this time frame to reduce the likelihood of analyzing a tweet that discussed a holiday or special event which would influence the focus of the tweet.

Sampling Plan

All tweets were identified and recorded using Topsy.com, a social media analytics website which allows one to analyze all tweets ever created. All tweets were obtained from Topsy by doing a search for the hashtag symbol followed by each church's Twitter account name. For instance, the following hashtag variables were examined: (a) #lakewoodchurch, (b) #northpoint, (c) #WillowCreekCC, (d) #newspring, and (e) #HighlandsNews. The tweets obtained from Topsy were then saved as screen shots and used for the content analysis.

Coding Procedure

The initial content categories that were developed aimed to determine if the tweets referenced the megachurch, a sermon, the pastor, an event, or something else. After establishing inter-coder reliability of .5470 using Krippendorff's Alpha, these content categories remained the same for the final coding process. Although .5470 is considered a low inter-coder reliability

estimate, all coders proceeded to complete all coding because the educational backgrounds of each coder made agreeing to predetermined coding rules challenging, even after multiple rounds of codebook training and codebook revisions. For instance, one coder studied technical communication, and the other two coders studied mass communication so the coder with the technical communication background analyzed language and text in a completely different way than the two coders with a mass communications background.

In addition to the content category of each tweet, this study aimed to determine the tone of the hashtagged tweets. Initially, the tonality options were “positive,” “negative,” “neutral,” and “other.” However, after recognizing that the tone of a tweet cannot be classified as “other,” the “other” classification category was relabeled as “N/A” or “not applicable” as it contained tweets with no reference to this study or to the church.

Furthermore, the tweets were also analyzed to determine what predefined theme they identified with. The initial thirteen predetermined themes were: “Money,” “dress,” “children,” “adults,” “holidays,” “Christianity,” “study,” “rehearsals,” “community relations,” “music,” “dance,” “home life,” and “other.” After consideration of Christian and biblical principles associated with the initial 13 themes, it was apparent that some of the 13 themes could be grouped in order to align themes with a biblical background. Therefore, the updated predefined themes consisted of “money,” “attire,” “people,” “holidays,” “worship,” “weekly activities,” “missions,” and “other.”

As a final point, the last goal of the analysis was to determine if the hashtagged tweets reflected the church’s mission statement by using a 5 point Likert scale. While establishing reliability, the Likert scale points evolved multiple times to ensure validity and consistency between coders. The initial Likert scale simply asked coders to determine if the tweet was highly

reflective, somewhat reflective, neither reflective nor unreflective, somewhat unreflective or highly unreflective of each church's mission statement. After coding twenty percent of tweets hashtagging the Lakewood church, the initial codebook was updated and the descriptions of each point within the scale were adjusted. The points on the scale were adjusted because they were subjective and each coder had a different perception of the meaning of reflective. For this reason, instead of focusing on perception like the initial five-point Likert scale, the final scale focused on how the tweets reflected the mission statement by measuring the amount of words contained in the tweets that were also present within the church's mission statement.

In the end, a final coded book was created (See Appendix C) after reaching .5470 of inter-coder reliability using Krippendorff's Alpha. Krippendorff's Alpha was used because it permits any level of data to be examined with any number of coders. A group of three graduate students were then trained by using the final codebook to examine all tweets. The coding instructions from the finalized codebook are now addressed.

Content Categories

During the final round of coding, all tweets were coded for the predetermined categories that emerged from hashtag use of followers, and to uncover if hashtagged posts are related to achievement of the megachurches's mission statements. The five content categories identified were (a) Pastor, (b) Church, (c) Sermon, (d) Events, and (e) Other. In other words, the study determined whether Twitter followers were talking about their pastor, their church, the sermon they heard, church events, or other issues. These categories were selected because they incorporate a multitude of topics that are often discussed among church members regardless of whether they are physically together or through or are using computer-mediated communication.

Subsequently, the study determined the tones of the tweets in regard to the above-mentioned content categories. The tone options consisted of (a) positive, (b) negative, (c) neutral, or (d) N/A. This categorization was critical because negative comments cannot be seen as furthering the cause of any of the churches being examined. Positive comments, however, were considered beneficial to the church, and useful in helping the churches fulfill their goals. Tweets that did not display a like or dislike towards anything were classified as maintaining a neutral tonality. Finally, tweets not applicable to this study were irrelevant or intended to hashtag another Twitter account holder that shared the same display name as the church.

In addition to tonality, the study identified recurring themes that were present within the above-referenced content categories. The final list of themes identified were “money,” “attire,” “people,” “holidays,” “worship,” “weekly activities,” “missions,” and “other.”

The last item that was examined was a 5 point Likert scale asking how well the hashtagged tweet reflected the church’s mission statement. The five points on the scale were (a) Highly reflective, (b) Somewhat reflective, (c) Neutral, (d) Somewhat unreflective, and (e) Highly unreflective. This Likert scale was used for the purpose of assessing how well each tweet reflected the mission statements of each mega church by measuring the number of words present with each tweet that were also within the mission statement.

Therefore, the following coding scheme was applied to all of the collected tweets: (a) content category, (b) tonality of the tweet, (c) themes of the hashtag, and (d) Mission reflection. Each category was determined based on the following instructions:

Content. The content of each hashtagged tweet was analyzed to determine if the tweet was in reference to the church’s pastor, the church, a sermon, event, or something else. Tweets relating to the pastor may acknowledge the pastor’s name directly through Twitter’s “@” feature

or the tweet may contain the phrases “pastor,” “preacher,” or other ministry leadership terms. All tweets mentioning the church or specifically stating the church’s name were classified as church. Any hashtagged tweets related to a sermon highlighted a scripture reference or quoted a statement made by the church’s pastor. All hashtagged tweets that referred to events mentioned holidays recognized by Christians, weddings, church events or church auxiliary group events. All tweets that did not fall within one of these content categories were placed within the category labeled “other.”

Tonality. The tonality of each hashtagged tweet was analyzed to interpret if the tweet had a” positive,” “negative,” “neutral,” or “other” tone in terms of language use. A tweet with a positive tone highlighted the church in a positive manner by sharing a connection to the megachurch or confessing fondness of the church. Positive tweets contained favorable or supportive posts. If the messages left the reader with a generally favorable view of the megachurch, it had a positive tone. These particular tweets did not include negative references to the church.

Any tweet with a negative tonality did not discuss positive views of the church. Tweets that discredited, mocked, or disapproved of the churches were placed within this category. Posts that were unfavorable and caused the reader to have a generally unfavorable view of the megachurch had a negative tone. Most content in this category reported conflict and/or controversy and focused on pessimistic issues.

Lastly, any tweet that displayed neither favor nor disfavor was classified as maintaining a neutral tonality. These tweets contained posts that simply hashtagged the church without any other words or content. Neutral posts contained content that reflected neither positive nor negative content they simply posted a comment.

Themes. The hashtagged tweets were also be categorized according to themes. For instance, tweets related to “money,” “attire,” “people,” “holidays,” “worship,” “weekly,” activities.” “missions,” and “other.”

Tweets reflecting money discussed areas related to philanthropy, tithing, fundraisers, and offerings. All tweets that reflected attire mentioned clothing, head pieces, and any form of worship garments. Tweets reflecting people acknowledged topics referencing children, teenagers, and adults. Tweets reflecting holidays addressed major national holidays celebrated by the Christian community such as Easter, Christmas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Lent, Advent, and Pentecost. Tweets reflecting worship discussed Christian practices such a prayer, fasting, baptism, salvation, re-dedication, Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. Worship Tweets also mentioned or discussed blessings, peace, prosperity, faith, evangelism, or church services. All tweets that mentioned music played during church service and dancing taking place during service were also classified as worship. Tweets that described Christian principles practiced within the home and discussions of life outside of church were also categorized as worship. Tweets reflecting bible study, life groups, choir rehearsal, band rehearsal, or dance rehearsals were categorized as weekly activities. Tweets reflecting missions mentioned community service, mission’s trips, volunteering, feeding the homeless, and evangelism. Lastly, all tweets failing to discuss the above mentioned categories were classified as other.

Likert scale. Each of the 5 points on the Likert scale were used to assess if tweets reflected the mission statements of each megachurch. An example of fulfilling the mission statement could be as simple as obtaining new members. The points on the scale were (a) Highly reflective, (b) Somewhat reflective, (c) neither a reflective nor unreflective, (d) Somewhat unreflective, and (e) Highly unreflective.

Tweets that were identical to the mission statement of each church were classified as highly reflective. An example was a follower describing how connected he/she felt to God and the church's mission statement stated that they aimed to connect people to God. Tweets that were somewhat reflective of the mission statement mentioned at least two words noted within the mission statement. Somewhat reflective tweets identified some areas of the mission statement but did not cover every area. An example was a tweet that described a love for Jesus Christ and then mentioned how they love the church they attend while the church's mission statement mentioned Jesus Christ. Tweets that were "neither reflective nor unreflective" simply mentioned one word from the mission statement and the message may or may not be in reference to the church. An example was a tweet that discussed a topic about church and mentioned the word "relationship" while the church's mission statement mentioned that it aimed to build relationships to Jesus Christ. Tweets that were somewhat unreflective had some relation to Christianity but no reference to the mission statement. An example may be a post mentioning how someone enjoyed Bible study, whereas as the mission statement of the church would be "to help people have a stronger relationship with God." Posts that were highly unreflective had no relation to the church's mission statement and no relation to the topic of this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to discover the extent to which implementation of Twitter in megachurches contributes to the accomplishment of the ministries' mission statements and goals. In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, a total of 227 tweets from the Twitter account pages of the top 5 megachurches were analyzed during a 16-day time period. The original to total of tweets analyzed was 288 however, 61 tweets were removed from this total because they were classified as N/A for not pertaining to this study. Overall, the study aimed to determine:

1. To what extent do the topics of conversation in hashtags by followers reflect topics that are beneficial to the churches' growth?
2. To what extent is Twitter implementation, as currently used, congruent with the megachurches' missions?

RQ 1 Results

In order to protect anonymity, all churches discussed within this section will be referred to as Churches "A," "B," and "C." Two-thirds of all tweets (190 for 66%) discussed topics that were relevant or beneficial to the growth of the church. Only a third of all tweets collected discussed topics other than those that were beneficial to churches' growth. The differences among these themes were statistically significant with the majority of tweets being about the pastor and the sermon. As Table 1 below displays, the top two content categories addressed within tweets the most were 'church' and 'sermon.' The content category with the least amount of attention was 'pastor.'

Table 1: Frequency Distribution: Content Categories Found In Hashtagged Tweets Of All Churches

Tone	Frequency	Valid Percent
Pastor	11	4.8
Church	103	45.4
Sermon	63	27.8
Event	13	5.7
Other	37	16.3
Total	227	100

After analyzing the tonality of all tweets pertaining to all megachurches within this study, an overwhelming amount of tweets were positively toned.

Table 2: Tone For All Churches

Tone	Frequency	Valid Percent
Negative	7	3.1
Neutral	38	16.7
Positive	182	80.2
Total	227	100.0

A chi square statistical analysis was used to determine the extent to which the topics of conversation in hashtagged posts by followers reflected topics that were beneficial to churches' growth. Results from a chi-square test revealed, $\chi^2 (1, N= 227, df=4) = 14.116$, where the p-value = .007. This result shows that there is a significant difference present between positive and negative tone.

Table 3: Chi Square

Church	(N)	Positive Observed	Positive Expected	% Positive Within Church	Residual
Church A	31	19	24.9	61.3	33.3
Church B	97	86	77.8	88.7	33.3
Church C	99	77	79.4	77.8	33.3
Total	227	182	182		

$\chi^2 (1, N= 227, df=4) = 14.116$

In addition to content categories and tone, the following theme distribution was identified from all churches.

Table 4: Frequency Distributions of Themes Found In All Hashtagged Tweets

	Theme	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Attire	1	.4
	People	8	3.5
	Worship	138	60.8
	Weekly Activities	8	3.5
	Missions	1	.4
	Other	71	31.3
	Total	227	100.0

Overall, the above table shows that 227 hashtagged tweets pertained to: attire (.4%), of people (3.5%), worship (60.8%), weekly activities (3.5%), missions (.4%), and tweets categorized as “other” (31.3%).

RQ 2 Results

Table 5: Mission Scale Results for All Churches

Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Highly unreflective	102	56.6
Somewhat unreflective	124	43.1
Somewhat reflective	1	.3

Results for the second research question revealed that overall, tweets did not reflect each church's mission statement. Overall, all 227 hashtagged tweets had the following relation to all church mission statements: Highly unreflective (56.6%), somewhat unreflective (43.1%), and Somewhat reflective (.3%).

Meanwhile the second research question asked, "To what extent is Twitter implementation, as currently used, congruent with megachurches' mission?" Overall the table displays that Twitter, as currently use, is not an effective tool to help promote megachurches' missions. Data obtained from this study also revealed that over 50% of all hashtagged tweets were in reference to the church and over half of all of the tweets had a positive tone. Roughly 85% of the tweets were highly unreflective of the church mission statements.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Overall, this study revealed that tweets pertaining to the top five megachurches were predominantly positive tweets pertaining to the church with reference to Christianity but no reference to the church's mission statement.

Discussion

After completing this study, it was apparent that the level of difficulty was high in attempting to measure how each tweet reflected each mission statement based on identified word count associated with each mission statement. Initially, the scale was too subjective, as it asked coders to identify if the hashtagged tweets reflected each mission statement; however, all coders had different interpretations of the meaning of 'reflect.' One coder viewed the term as 'identical' or 'a mirror image,' whereas another coder examined if the language used in each tweet replicated the essence of the language used within each mission statement. For this reason, this scale may have benefitted from determining if the hashtagged tweet reflected the overall intent or goal of the mission statement instead of focusing on word count.

A challenge with creating the codebook for this quantitative study was attempting to develop a scale that could be used effectively. It became difficult to get coders to agree on pre-determined definitions. For this reason, some coders may read the provided definitions and feel the tweet is reflective of the mission of the church but not reflective of the mission statement. Tweets were highly unreflective of the mission statement but highly reflective of the overall mission and goal of the megachurches. Due to the challenges associated with this scale, it would be useful to use a 3-point scale instead of a 5-point scale because the 5-point scale was based on the attitudes of the coder's reactions to my predefined definitions. The 5-point scale used in this

study resulted in more room for interpretation amongst coders. Overall, in terms of reflecting the mission statements, tweets were not reflective of the words contained in the mission statements but they were reflective of the church, which then identifies with the devotional-promotional communication model which aims to connect individuals to their object of devotion or God.

In addition to the difficulty involved with measuring tweets with the proposed scale, the initial round of coding was a challenge, as some tweets could be classified into multiple content categories. For example, the mission of each megachurch may have focused on more factors than just its mission statement such as church, pastor and sermon simultaneously. Therefore, a tweet may not contain the exact words found in a mission statement but that didn't imply that the meaning of the tweet wasn't reflective of the missions of the church. For instance, a goal or mission of the church may also be to increase new members but a tweet may not mention anything about new members. In order to decrease coding disagreement between coders and make categories more mutually exclusive, the guidelines for each content category had to be adjusted during codebook revisions.

Initially, it was difficult determining the extent to which topics of conversation provided benefits to church growth. However, after codebook revisions, this procedure was simplified to address positively toned tweets in reference to anything about the megachurches. Minimizing the qualifications of this procedure resulted in all coders being able to have less disagreements during the final coding round. It is also important to note that despite many of the megachurches maintaining thousands of members, many megachurches still don't have a Twitter presence online.

After reflecting on my inclusion of marketing literature focusing on content analyses and Twitter, it became apparent that although it may appear that marketing is being implemented by

megachurches via Twitter, their main concern is relational connections. For instance, when viewing the websites of each megachurch, the overall message is that the megachurch is marketed as a 'one stop' central location that meets the needs of all congregants and the surrounding community, however, all messaging and posts have emphasis on the relational aspect of megachurches and how they aim to lead people in developing relationships with God. One relational approach implemented by some of the megachurches was displaying how they structure their ministry for the purpose of serving the church community. One factor of this servitude deals with the resources and services offered to church members such as day care, counseling, school, and support groups. All of these services then aim to assist people by meeting their needs so they can worship free from concerns of whether they will obtain the assistance they need. Providing these services aims to show how much the churches care for their congregants, thus enhancing relationships.

It was also apparent that Lakewood church used Twitter as more of a marketing approach as compared to the other megachurches examined based on the different options one could use to access Lakewood Church's Twitter via their church website. The remaining megachurches studied had simple and small social media ribbons located in a corner of their website's homepage. This led me to believe that the Twitter links and social media ribbons simply aimed to connect website visitors to the church verses marketing tools. Unfortunately, although efforts made by these megachurches may aim to be positive and focused on the relationship aspect of connecting, their efforts may be misconstrued as seeking recognition and monetary gain. This confusion or opposition may be another factor as to why it is challenging for the top megachurches to obtain a social media presence.

Future Directions for research

Future direction for research may involve utilizing an alternate Twitter feature such as the “@” symbol for the purpose of analyzing all tweets that contain the “@” symbol in connection to each church.

Perhaps this study may have also benefited from a more longitudinal approach because it is interesting how out of the top five megachurches examined, only three contained a considerable amount of tweets which may implicate that the megachurches still have not fully adopted Twitter. Whereas if this study was completed over time, one could find peaks or substantial influx of tweets during specific times.

A different social media platform may also be utilized for this study. Potential social media platform options consist of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Vine. If Facebook was used for a similar study, perhaps one could begin following the page by “liking” it and then begin to examine and code comments, videos, or photos posted on the timeline. Monitoring these posts may shed light on who frequently posts, what they post about, as well as if the posts relate to the missions of the churches. All of these items may be tracked by scrolling down each church’s timeline or by utilizing a search engine similar to Topsy in which you may insert a timeframe and produce all posts within that given time frame.

A replication of this study may also be done using Instagram which serves as a social media platform geared towards posting photos and video. With this platform however, it is a bit difficult to track posts because they aren’t dated. As they appear on your newsfeed, all you can determine is how long ago the post was created down to seconds, minutes or hours. If one visited the Instagram account of each megachurch you could then view all posts the church was tagged in as well as posts the church created.

YouTube has become immensely popular and frequently visited by many people. For this reason, it may be useful to monitor videos uploaded by the church and monitor comments posted in response to the video. The main challenge with this is that many megachurches don't have YouTube accounts because they post their videos and sermons on the websites directly. Another hindrance to a study like this with YouTube is the comment disabling feature that many account holders activate. This feature prevents people from posting any comment pertaining to the video so it would be impossible to track feedback on the videos. Overall, utilizing YouTube may only work in specific cases.

This study only examined the top three megachurches however, the study may benefit from studying the top ten megachurches over a longer time frame. This study could have also benefitted from taking a qualitative approach and thoroughly examining the content of each tweet rather than just quantifying the content.

**APPENDIX A:
WILLOW CREEK CHURCH WEBSITE**



Figure 5-1: Willow Creek Church Website

APPENDIX B: JOEL OSTEEN WEBISTE

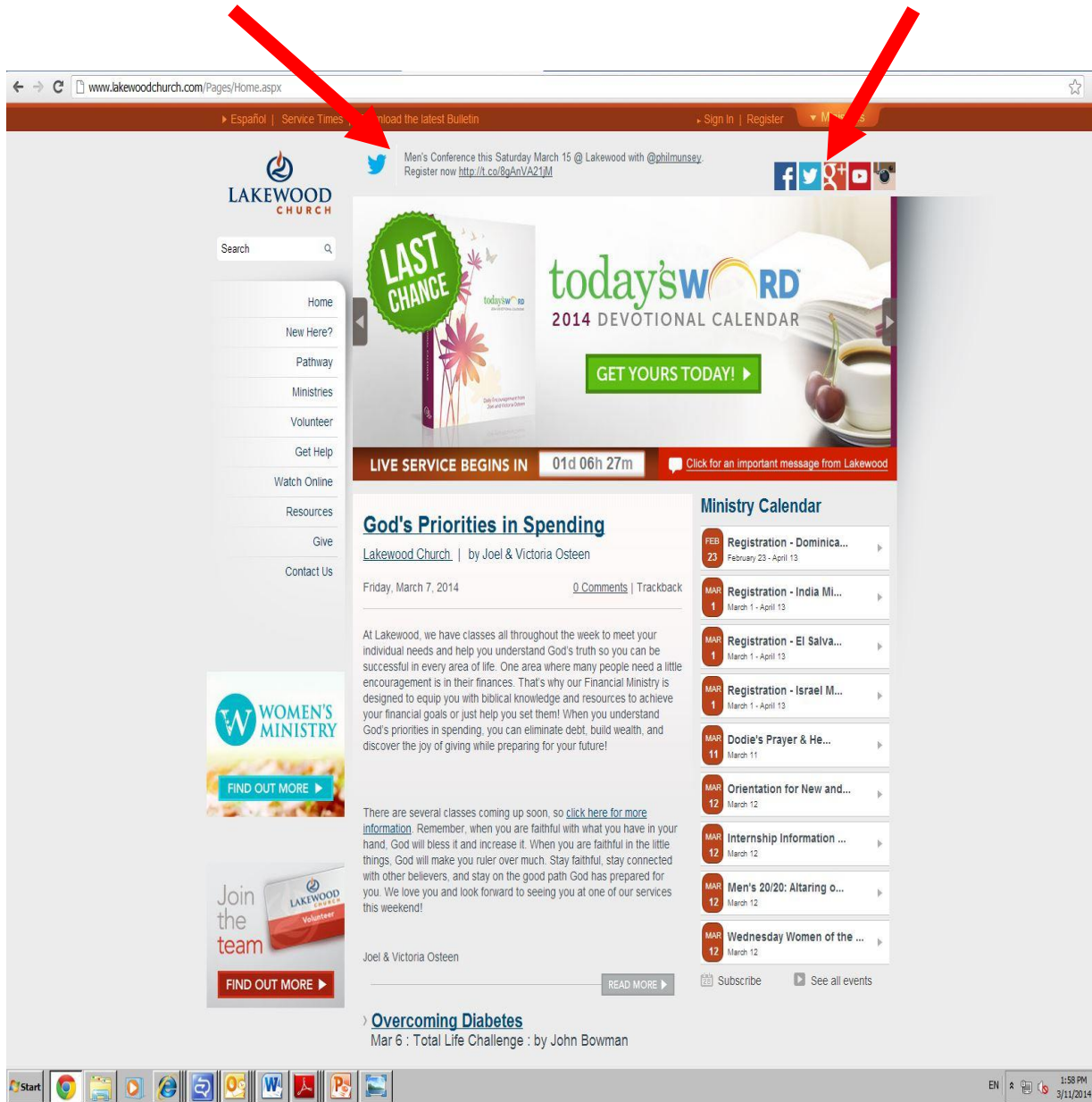


Figure 5-2: Lakewood Church Website

APPENDIX C: CODING SCHEME

Unit of Data Collection: Top five megachurches in size

Megachurches: 1. Lakewood Church, 2. Northpoint Church, 3. Willow Creek Community Church, 4. New Spring Church, and 5. Highlands Community Church

Megachurch hashtags: 1. #lakewoodchurch, 2. #northpoint, 3. #WillowCreekCC, 4. #newspring, and 5. #HighlandsNews

Coder ID: Each coder has received an individual number, Please write this number on the sheet.

1= Coder 1

2= Coder 2

3= Coder 3

Content Category: Please assign the following number to each response (Pastor, church, sermon, events, other.)

The content of each hashtagged tweet will be analyzed to determine if the tweet is in reference to the church's pastor, the church, a sermon, event, or something else.

1=Pastor

2=church

3=sermon

4=events

5= other

Pastor: Tweets reflecting the pastor acknowledged the pastor's name directly through Twitters' "@" feature or the tweets contained the phrases "pastor," "preacher," or other ministry leadership terms. Tweets reflecting the pastor also mentioned the pastor's delivery of a message or sermon without acknowledging the content of the sermon.

Church: Tweets reflecting the church specifically stated the church's name and were classified as church.

Sermon: Tweets reflecting the sermon highlighted a scripture reference or quoted a statement made by the church's pastor. Tweets reflecting the sermon also mentioned the content of a sermon or message but not the delivery of a message or sermon.

Events: Tweets reflecting events mentioned holidays recognized by Christians or church events.

Other: Tweets that did not fall within any of these content categories were placed within a category “other.”

Tonality: Please assign the following number to each response (positive, neutral, negative, or N/A)

1=Positive-3 2=Negative-1 3=Neutral-2 4=Not Applicable (N/A)

Positive: Tweets with a positive tone highlighted the church in a positive manner by sharing a connection to the church or confessing fondness of the church. Positive tweets contained favorable or supportive content. Positive tweets left the reader with a generally favorable view of the church. These particular tweets did not include negative references to the church.

Negative: Tweets with a negative tone did not discuss positive views of the church. Negative tweets discredited, mocked, and disapproved the church. Negative tweets were also unfavorable which caused the reader to have a generally unfavorable view of the church. Most negative tweets reported conflict and/or controversy and focused on pessimistic issues.

Neutral: Tweets that did not display a like or dislike towards anything will be classified as maintaining a neutral tonality. Neutral tweets simply hashtagged the church without any other words or content. Neutral tweets also exhibited a balance between favorable and non-favorable content.

N/A: Tweets not applicable to this study were irrelevant. Not applicable tweets intended to hashtag another Twitter account holder that shared the same display name as the church.

Themes: Please assign the following number to each response (positive, neutral, negative, or other)

1=Money 2=Attire 3=People 4=Holidays 5=Worship 6=Weekly activities 7=Missions
8=Other

Money: Tweets reflecting money discussed areas related to philanthropy, tithing, fundraisers, and offerings.

Attire: Tweets reflecting attire mentioned clothing, head pieces, and any form of worship garments.

People: Tweets reflecting people acknowledged topics referencing children, teenagers, and adults.

Holidays: Tweets reflecting holidays addressed major national holidays celebrated by the Christian community such as Easter, Christmas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Lent, Advent, and Pentacost.

Worship: Tweets reflecting worship discussed Christian practices such a prayer, fasting, baptism, salvation, and re-dedication, Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. Worship Tweets also

mentioned or discussed blessings, peace, prosperity, faith, evangelism, or church services. All tweets that mentioned music played during church service and dancing taking place during service were also classified as worship. Tweets that described Christian principles practiced within the home and discussions of life outside of church were also categorized as worship.

Weekly activities: Tweets reflecting bible study, life groups, choir rehearsal, band rehearsal, or dance rehearsals were categorized as weekly activities.

Missions: Tweets reflecting missions mentioned community service, mission's trips, volunteering, feeding the homeless and evangelism.

Other: All tweets failing to discuss the above mentioned categories were classified as other.

Mission Likert Scale: Please assign the following number to each response (highly reflective, somewhat reflective, neither a reflective nor unreflective, somewhat unreflective, highly unreflective)

1=highly reflective-5 2=somewhat reflective-4 3= neither a reflective nor unreflective-3
4=somewhat unreflective-2 5=highly unreflective-1

Highly reflective: Tweets that were identical to the mission statement of each church were classified as highly reflective. An example was a follower describing how connected they felt to God and the church's mission statement stated that they aimed to connect people to God.

Somewhat reflective: Tweets that were somewhat reflective of the mission statement mentioned at least two words noted within the mission statement. Somewhat reflective tweets identified some areas of the mission statement but the tweet did not cover every area. An example was a tweet that described a love for Jesus Christ and then mentioned how they love the church they attend while the church's mission statement mentioned Jesus Christ.

Neither reflective nor unreflective: Tweets that were "neither reflective nor unreflective" simply mentioned one word from the mission statement and the message may or may not be in reference to the church. An example was a tweet that discussed a topic about church and mentioned the word "relationship" while the church's mission statement mentioned that it aimed to build relationships to Jesus Christ.

Somewhat unreflective: Tweets that were somewhat unreflective had some relation to Christianity but no reference to the mission statement. An example may be a post mentioning how someone enjoyed Bible study, whereas as the mission statement of the church would be "to help people have a stronger relationship with God."

Highly unreflective: Posts that were highly unreflective had no relation to the church's mission statement and no relation to the topic of this study.

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