

AM I TALKING TO A PERSON OR A CORPORATION?
HOW BRANDS CAN FACILITATE CONVERSATIONS WITH
AUDIENCES

by

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Drawing on the dialogic communication framework, this paper examines how two Disney parks accounts dialogically communicated with their audiences through Twitter, and how that communication style is related to the audiences' interaction with the accounts. I primarily wanted to examine the effect the use of dialogic communication tools had on interaction levels and on the discourse in the reply section of each tweet. @DisneyParks utilized more dialogic communication strategies than @WaltDisneyWorld, but the use of dialogic communication resulted in less interaction from audiences across both accounts. Significantly, neither account responded to any audience comments, operating these communication channels as formal communication venues from a corporation without dialogic engagement that would reach a more personal level with audiences. Based on these findings, I proposed suggestions for Disney's communication strategy on social media to enhance audience interaction and place more emphasis on building relationships with interested audiences.

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Introduction and Literature Review

Social media revolutionized how organizations communicate with publics. It was the first communication channel of the digital age that encouraged two-way communication between an organization and its audiences, moving organizations from broadcast monologues to social dialogues and opening up entirely new avenues of engagement with publics (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). It has become integral for organizations and corporations to focus on building relationships on social media platforms, rather than using the sites as a mass information dispersal tool. Though certain brands rise above in our minds as excelling in the areas of corporate utilization of social media – Wendy’s, Starbucks, Ben and Jerry’s and Duolingo, for example – most corporations are not using social media in a way that is creating the most benefit for their audiences or their organization.

Building relationships on social media is a strategy that has allowed certain organizations to rise in positive opinion among consumers. Kent and Taylor laid the groundwork for dialogic communication, stating that “public relations is shifting to interpersonal forms of communication.” (Kent & Taylor, 2002). They established five tenets of dialogism in public relations: mutuality, the recognition of an organization-public relationship; propinquity, the spontaneity of interactions between organizations and their publics; empathy, the supportiveness of publics’ interests; risk, a willingness to interact with publics on their terms; and commitment, the extent to which organizations devotes energy to the dialogue, interpretation and understanding of interactions with publics. All of this is to say that both the organization and the audience need to attempt to understand the other’s values and continue the conversation until a

mutual understanding is reached (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Kent and Taylor also established five principles that are crucial to organization-public dialogic communication: These are dialogic loops, ease of interface, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits and usefulness of information (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Though these dialogic principles were originally meant for website communication, researchers have increasingly applied them to social media communication. For example, a study connecting dialogic communication with engagement found that usefulness of information is the most commonly used dialogic communication strategy despite the fact that it is the least effective in creating dialogues (Wang & Yang, 2020). Conservation of visitors is the most effective communication strategy to gain engagement and interaction (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Organizations can conserve visitors by posting frequently, as well as employing other dialogic actions like responding to user comments, asking unprompted questions and then asking follow-up questions (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Specifically, creating a more personified corporate character on social media can also lead to enhanced engagement as well as the creation of organization-public relationships (Men & Tsai, 2015). By making an organization appear friendly, empathetic and open, audiences are more likely to positively interact with the organization (Men & Tsai, 2015). Organizations should be willing to interact with publics, so they can create more meaningful relationships with them. Most organizations, however, do not capitalize on the dialogic functions of social media (Kent & Taylor, 2002). They send information into the void of the Internet and then hope that their messages are received; social media has become the digital version of a

message in a bottle. Even in 2018 – 16 years after Kent and Taylor released their original study of dialogic communication – only 20% of Fortune 500 companies utilize high levels of dialogism in their social media content (Aced-Toledano & Lalueza, 2018). It was found that the level of interaction with publics from companies is very low and many companies do not have an interest in facilitating conversations with their audiences (Aced-Toledano & Lalueza, 2018). Further, 43% of Fortune 500 companies were found not to respond to audiences' comments, indicating that they view social media as monologue rather than a dialogue (Aced-Toledano & Lalueza, 2018). The value of focusing on creating dialogic relationships is an increase in audience feelings of trust, mutuality and empathy (Wang & Yang, 2020). Developing this trust in corporations is crucial because consumers' trust in an organization plays a critical role in purchase intent, brand loyalty and spreading positive word of mouth (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand loyalty is linked to brand performance which is characterized by a greater market share (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), so using dialogic communication to build relationships with audiences that then increase feelings of trust and brand loyalty will help organizations in establishing a greater market share. Simply, building relationships with audiences will help organizations meet a primary organizational goal of making a profit.

To examine how to create more engaging posts on social media, it is crucial to examine what engagement is and how it differentiates from interaction. Social media engagement is characterized by information consumption, sense of presence, interest immersion and social connectivity (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Therefore, it is more than simply clicking like, share, retweet or even comment. Engagement indicates

cognitive immersion and the following desire to share that information with others (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Interaction in this study is defined as the audiences replies, retweets and likes seen in each tweet.

Based on the literature, the following research questions are provided.

1. Do dialogic posts typically get more interactivity than non-dialogic posts?
2. What does the discourse in replies look like in dialogic posts and non-dialogic posts?

Methods

In this study, I want to examine how one corporation dialogically engaged with audiences through its social media accounts, and how their attempted engagement related to different levels of audience interactivity. I chose to examine the Walt Disney Company because it has a well-known brand, and I wanted to see if that translated on social media. I examined the @DisneyParks Twitter account and the @WaltDisneyWorld Twitter account. I chose to use Twitter as my social media platform of interest because it allowed me to gather interaction metrics more easily than other platforms. Without any administrative access, I can gather replies, retweets and likes from each tweet. I selected these two accounts because they have very similar audiences: people who enjoy visiting Disney theme parks. The differentiation is that @WaltDisneyWorld focuses exclusively on the theme parks located in Florida, while @DisneyParks shares information about all six of the Disney theme parks – Disneyland, Walt Disney World, Disneyland Paris, Tokyo Disney, Hong Kong Disneyland and Shanghai Disneyland. I briefly scrolled through the content on each account to get a general understanding of what typical tweets look like. At first glance, it appeared that @WaltDisneyWorld used Twitter as primarily a platform to share information about what was going on in its theme parks. @DisneyParks, on the other hand, seemed to take a more interactive approach. It shared recipe videos, park-themed crafts and trivia with audiences. I thought these two accounts would contribute to an interesting study because the content they have to work with is relatively similar, but the social media strategies they used were completely different.

Using a qualitative research method of discourse analysis, I collected every tweet @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld posted from May 16, 2020, through September 13, 2020, isolating original tweets in the time period I needed using Twitter's advanced search feature. This totaled 207 tweets that I conducted a discourse analysis on. Original tweets are categorized as tweets in which the original poster is either @DisneyParks or @WaltDisneyWorld. Retweets and quote tweets were not included. There were some tweets that were duplicated as original tweets across both platforms and since a new tweet was created despite having the same content, I counted it as an original tweet.

This research method is observational of a digital space. By individually examining every post and reading the discourse in the replies, I was able to conduct a discourse analysis of the tweets from Disney and the replies that tweet elicited. I coded every tweet according to my codebook on a coding sheet I created in Qualtrics, see Appendix B. Significantly, I collected interaction data for each tweet, whether the tweet included dialogic elements and the tone of tweets – both dialogic and non-dialogic. The interaction metrics I measured were replies, retweets and likes. These metrics were easily available in the body of the tweet. The dialogic elements I recorded were those that asked for audience participation, asked a question and responding to audience comments. Asking for participation could look like posting a tutorial on a drawing and encouraging audiences to try it out and share how they did in the reply section. Asking a question could look like asking audiences to share in the replies whether they are feeling more like Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck or Goofy that day. Replying to comments is more self-explanatory, but it occurs when the posting account replies to a

user's reply on its tweet. To determine the tone of tweet replies, I read through as much of the reply section as I could, based on the number of replies on that tweet. If there were less than 10 replies, I determined if the majority were positive, negative or neutral. If there were more than 10 replies, I read through as many replies as I could and used my best judgement on the discourse. I coded for more variables like tweet category, media elements included and accounts tagged as well, but these variables are not as significant to my research questions. Further explanations of my coding scheme can be found in Appendix A.

As I coded, I assigned each tweet a number that I recorded on my survey and also listed on a document, where I included hyperlinks to the tweets (see Appendix C). This allowed me to easily reference back to tweets to find supporting data, commentary and other information.

Findings

@DisneyParks tweeted more than twice as much as @WaltDisneyWorld from May 16, 2020, to September 13, 2020. @DisneyParks, despite having fewer followers, averaged more replies, retweets and likes than @WaltDisneyWorld (see Table 1). For reference, on July 15, 2020, @DisneyParks had 1,845,789 followers (Disney Parks) and @WaltDisneyWorld had 3,189,961 followers (Walt Disney World).

Dialogic tweets aim to engage audiences in conversation, and I coded tweets as dialogic when they asked for participation in activities, asked a question or replied to audience comments. In terms of utilizing dialogic elements in tweets, about 10% of @DisneyParks' tweets utilized dialogic elements and about 8% of @WaltDisneyWorld's tweets utilized dialogic elements. @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld only utilized two tools of dialogic communication: asking for participation and asking a question. Importantly, neither account ever responded to a comment from audiences. Even if the posting account asked a question and received responses, Disney accounts did not reply to single response from audiences. Tweets containing dialogic elements averaged less interaction than tweets not containing dialogic elements (see Table 1).

Despite getting less engagement, tweets that contained dialogic elements typically received more positive responses in the replies than tweets without dialogic elements. Replies in tweets that utilized dialogic elements were more related to the question asked or the interaction requested. 85% of dialogic tweets received positive engagement in the reply section, whereas around 60% of non-dialogic tweets received positive engagement (see Table 3).

One tweet received significantly more interaction than all other tweets. Tweet number 75 from Disney Parks announced the retheming of Splash Mountain in Walt Disney World and Disneyland, and this announcement went viral. Splash Mountain's current theme is derived from the 1946 film *Song of the South* and would be changed to align with the 2009 film *The Princess and the Frog*. This tweet received 99.16% more replies, 99.46% more retweets and 98.60% more likes than the average tweet (see Table 2). This tweet is not dialogic and only focuses on distributing information. The information that it shared, however, directly tapped into a changing social movement of the time. This time period saw a sharp rise in activity of the Black Lives Matter movement, and a sub-debate over the removal of historical monuments of controversial figures also saw a rise in attention (Fryer et al., 2021). This tweet directly related to that sub-movement. *The Song of the South* is most known now for promoting racist stereotypes surrounding African and black Americans; *Princess and the Frog*, on the other hand, was the first film from Walt Disney Animation Studios that featured a Black Disney princess. This retheming from *Song of the South* to *Princess and the Frog* was drawn as a parallel of the removal of monuments that immortalize racist figures to be replaced with monuments honoring the history of Africans and other black people in the United States. This tweet's exceptionally high interactivity indicates that more than dialogism, creating content that is reflective of what is going on the world at that particular moment plays a huge role in interaction. It should be noted, however, that this tweet was incredibly controversial. Though many people welcomed this retheming, more were upset at the loss of their favorite ride. This tweet actually spurred the creation of #SaveSplashMountain that appeared in the replies of many subsequent

tweets that were unrelated to the retheming. If engagement is the goal, aligning content with trends is the solution. It must be recognized though that the consequences can be severe, especially if the trend being followed is a controversial one.

To understand other trends that also resulted in large levels of interactivity, I examined interaction metrics by tweet category. When attempting to create dialogues with audiences, it is important to start conversations about content they care most about that also aligns with strategic communication goals. @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld tweeted about resort offerings more than any other type of post (see Figure 1), but this category did not always garner the most interaction. When not including the outlier tweet, posts about animal features received the most interaction on average between the three interaction metrics (replies, retweets and likes) (see Table 5). Animal features were not frequently posted, but they typically received a very positive response when they were. These posts led in the average number of likes and retweets, indicating that audiences appreciate seeing the animals in the resorts outside of perhaps their normal viewing window. Human features – which typically highlighted cast members – received the highest average number of replies. This speaks to audiences' love of the employees of Disney parks, who are known for their exceptional service (Johnson, 1991). This in-park service, it seems, translates into appreciation even on social media. Including the tweet announcing the retheming of Splash Mountain, however, skews this data to show resort offerings as the top performing category across all metrics. This speaks to a large reason why people follow corporations on social media – to learn information that is new in the company (Cho et al., 2017).

Discussion and Conclusions

Though @DisneyParks did tweet more dialogic content than @WaltDisneyWorld, tweets using elements of dialogic communication averaged less interaction than tweets that did not use elements of dialogic communication. The likely reason tweets using dialogic elements did not get more interaction is because of these two accounts' unwillingness to respond to comments. As explained by Rybalko and Seltzer in 2010, organizations must ask unprompted questions and then follow up with more questions or respond to user comments to truly employ dialogic communication and conserve visitors to their accounts. In each instance that @DisneyParks or @WaltDisneyWorld tried to start a conversation with audiences and audiences responded to continue the dialogue, there was no follow up by the posting account. The conversation was cut short by @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld's failure to respond to eager audiences.

One example of a failure to engage in dialogic communication is from @DisneyParks, when it shared a drink recipe featured in Oga's Cantina in Galaxy's Edge and mentioned the souvenir cup the drink comes with in the park (DP#125) (see Appendix D, example 5). Lauren (@flippiefloppies) shared a photo of her at Oga's Cantina drinking the beverage the recipe recreated in that specific souvenir cup. After seeing @DisneyPark's tweet, Lauren took time out of her day to go through her photos, find the photo of her at Oga's Cantina and share that she loved her experience so much that she was going to recreate it at home. @DisneyParks did not respond to her tweet, though doing so could have validated the effort she extended and showed that this company that she so deeply cares for cares about her as well. Not responding to Lauren

indicates a very present lack of commitment and mutuality by @DisneyParks to its audiences, and signals to other audience members that @DisneyParks will not put effort into any relationships with its publics. The reason behind this unwillingness to respond cannot be determined by this data set, but it is very likely not because @DisneyParks or @WaltDisneyWorld receives a large volume of replies to tweets. The average number of replies for each account is less than forty, and even replying to a couple of audience members would show a commitment to conversation and building relationships. @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld do not even attempt to foster relationships with audiences through dialogue, and further research could be done to determine why these accounts – and so many others – do not utilize this function of social media.

In the above example, however, @DisneyParks did not ask for engagement. Lauren offered it entirely unprompted, but this is not always the case. One particularly striking example of misuse in dialogic communication tactics was observed on International Dog Day. @DisneyParks lined up a series of posts on August 26, 2020, that featured cast members, characters, recipes and merchandise that all focused on Disney dogs. @WaltDisneyWorld also shared some of @DisneyParks tweets on their page as original posts, though the content was the same. Many of the tweets employed dialogic communication strategies in their captions, indicating an attempt to start conversation by @DisneyParks.

- DP #117 asked “What’s the name of your best fur-riend?” Twenty-five users replied, many of whom included photos of their dogs as well as their names. Some of these pets were even named after Disney characters, like Windu, Simba and Belle.

- DP #119 featured Disney’s pet merchandise and was captioned, “Share photos of your dog dressed in Disney attire with us using #DisneyMagicMoments!” In addition to using the hashtag, people replied with photos of their pups in Mickey ears and costumes.
- DP #120 and WDW #57 closed out the mini campaign by sharing photos of Pluto around the park and asking “Where have you spotted Pluto? Share your favorite photos with us now using #DisneyMagicMoments!” Over a dozen people posted photos of their interactions with Pluto in the parks, from restaurant meet and greets to mid-parade hellos.

In all of these tweets where @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld asked direct questions of their audiences, they did not respond to or interact with a single comment (see Appendix D, example 2).

This kind of disingenuous communication is easily identified by audiences. As people begin to regard brands on social media more as personalities than corporations, interactions must become more personal as well (Men & Tsai, 2015). Though it is not necessary to respond to every reply on a tweet, recognizing at least a couple indicates that your organization cares about its audiences. Real people would never ask a question and then fall silent when they receive a response. Rather than making the Disney parks seem more human, these tweets highlight that there is not a friendly, empathetic and open face behind the Disney accounts. Not only is this a misuse of dialogic communication, it could have negative effects on Disney’s brand identity. Disney’s brand image is associated with innovation and magic, and these positive perceptions could be damaged by their outdated approach to social media strategy (Winsor 2015).

Disney has the advantage of already having a clear brand identity and fans that are not only willing, but excited to engage. Many organizations struggle to get people to care about what they are doing. Disney fans engage with content even in posts that do not ask for interaction. They shared recipes they tried out (WDW #25), drawings they created (DP #110) and photos of them at the parks (DP #80) without any prompting, but also with no reciprocation in enthusiasm. Audiences spent time finding photos and creating art because they thought @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld would care about the effort they went to. The radio silence from these accounts is a sharp reminder to these users that Disney does not care enough about their fans to follow up on previously-posted tweets to express any gratitude for the effort expended, and they will be less likely to spend time engaging again. This clear unwillingness to communicate as equals significantly limits the number of people willing to interact or spend effort engaging with Disney accounts.

This also seems to be an isolated approach present in certain Disney accounts. In two posts (DP#35 and DP#106) that partnered with ShopDisney, guests with questions were responded to by ShopDisney. Further research could be done to determine if this more proactive approach to engaging with consumers directly affects engagement with ShopDisney.

This unwillingness to truly commit to facilitating conversations among audiences is especially unfortunate because dialogic posts typically received positive feedback in replies, indicating a point of difference between the discourse in dialogic and non-dialogic posts. Dialogic tweets had replies that were more targeted to the tweet content. If a question was asked, audiences answered it and sometimes shared brief

anecdotes of their experiences with the subject matter. Typically, audiences expressed a lot of excitement about the information they were sharing. For example, DP #12 asked audiences to share their Frozen-themed Disney bound outfits (see Appendix D, example 3). Disney bounding is creating an outfit that evokes the image of a certain Disney character without wearing a licensed costume. In this case, @stephphoto shared a photo of her Disney bound of Elsa, even including a plush toy from *Frozen 2*. Though this tweet didn't receive a lot of replies, Steph was so excited about her outfit that she was compelled enough to share her creation not only with @DisneyParks, but with anyone who looked at the tweet replies. We can see this as well in DP #138 (see Appendix D, example 4) where audiences eagerly guessed which attraction the GIF represented. Audiences want to share in conversations with Disney because it establishes that they are part of a community of others who also are excited about what Disney's Twitter accounts are posting.

This excitement to engage in with either @DisneyParks or @WaltDisneyWorld was not reciprocated as strongly in tweets not containing dialogic elements. Not only were non-dialogic tweets more likely to receive negative comments (see Table 6), but I saw that the replies were often unrelated to the tweet content. In one tweet sharing a photo of hyenas in Animal Kingdom, very few people actually commented on the hyenas. More often, people commented about their frustrations in the Splash Mountain retheme or the new safety precautions implemented in the parks (DP #37). Without any prompting from the caption about what the focus of the conversation should be, audiences took it in different and more negative directions. Asking a question or asking for participation guides the way people will respond. This is part of organizations

becoming more personable and human in their communications. If someone asked to see a photo of your dog, you would likely follow along that conversation guide of dogs or pets. It would be bizarre to respond to that question with an outburst about how expensive gas has gotten recently. This idea of conversation guides can be applied to what the discourse looks like in tweets that do not ask questions. Though the tweet content can act as a conversation guide, it is not quite as powerful in directing conversation as asking a question is. For example, DP #105 celebrated the anniversary of Disneyland's opening in 1955. This tweet was split between those reminiscing on good times at Disneyland (which was still closed due to the pandemic) and those criticizing the reopening of Walt Disney World. By asking a question as part of the tweet, responses could have been directed to a positive rather than left to be so open ended. For example, asking audiences to share their favorite memories at Disneyland from the past 65 years would direct conversations in a more positive direction. Celebrating the anniversary of Disneyland is more vague, and therefore leaves people to draw their own connections between Disneyland's anniversary and what is currently going on in the parks. Since this time was characterized by a lot of anger due to the opening of Walt Disney World, it is not too surprising to see so many negative comments on this tweet. Not only is dialogic communication a tool to start conversations, but it is also a tool to guide those conversations toward topics that encourage positive associations with your brand.

To determine which posts should focus on dialogic engagement, I examined trends that performed well that could be further enhanced by encouraging audience interaction. Posts I saw receiving more positive engagement than average highlighted an

animal or person that audiences were familiar with or even knew personally from their time in the parks. In one cast takeover (WD #11), people flooded the reply section because they knew the security guard that would be tweeting for the day. Because audiences could directly relate with the cast member posting, the tweet received higher interaction levels than the average @WaltDisneyWorld tweet. In an animal feature of two gorillas in Animal Kingdom (WD #41), people commented photos of when they had seen the mother-daughter gorilla duo in the park during their last visit. Three people took the time to go months back in their photos to celebrate this shared experience of seeing these two gorillas. The success of these two posts indicates that audiences would be willing to talk more about tweets featuring cast members and animals that are well-known throughout the parks.

When highlighting cast members, research would likely have to be done to determine which park operations cast members are well-known. There were two cast member takeovers on @WaltDisneyWorld's account, one that followed a security guard and one that followed a vice president. The first post announcing each takeover showed clear differences in engagement from audiences, with the takeover from a security guard performing better than the takeover from the vice president. WDW #11 got 26 more replies, 227 more retweets and 2,754 more likes than WDW #33. This indicates that cast members being highlighted should be at the park level, not working in executive corporate positions. It is easier to engage in conversation with people you can relate to, and it may be difficult for park-goers to relate to a vice president. Relating to a security guard – part of a cast member group that guests interact with each time they come to the parks – offers a sense of familiarity and comfortability. Once well-known

cast members have been identified, social media strategists can determine what about these cast members audiences would be most excited to talk about.

Audiences typically enjoyed tweets that shared how to bring Disney magic to their homes during the pandemic. Users tried recipes (WDW #9), listened to music (DP #21), watched sunsets rise above park monuments (DP #6) and tweeted their praises of cast-member takeovers (WDW #18). This nostalgia for visiting the parks was a universal experience among Disney fans during the pandemic, but it is also an experience shared among audiences even when the parks are open. Most guests at the Disney parks are not local; they are tourists visiting from across the state, the country and even the world. For many people and families, Disney vacations are spaced with years in between each visit. The time that lapses between their last Disney vacations and their next planned trip is characterized by many with a sense of nostalgia for their last vacation and anticipation for when they can visit next. Audience's nostalgia of visiting the Disney parks in person could be a starting point to initiate conversations with guests about what is happening and maintain their interest, even if it has been years since they last visited.

It should be acknowledged that the time frame chosen for this project likely affected the data that I collected. I chose to examine tweets from two months before and two months after the reopening of Walt Disney World because I anticipated that a time when the parks were closed could lead to more dialogic communication efforts. Because this was such an unusual time to create content and communicate information, it could be considered a limitation of this study. It should be noted, however, that there are few times periods devoid of breaking news that affects the way content is created. A

global pandemic, a celebration throughout the parks, a changing political atmosphere and a thousand other factors affect the way we create and consume content. In acknowledging that this time period for creating content was unique, I also must acknowledge that there are few time periods of “normal” content creation.

The core of this project does not tell us anything revolutionary about how people interact with each other. It tells us is that people want to be validated in their experiences. They want the organizations they love to share in their joy. They want to be answered when they ask a question. They want to be acknowledged as more than a Twitter user, but as a person that has a passion that burns so deeply in them that they have to share their experiences with the world. Disney parks are regarded as places where fantasy and reality combine, where true magic exists. This status is certainly a reward for hard work, but it is also a responsibility every single cast member must uphold to maintain that magic. The Walt Disney Company may be a corporation, but the cast members that work in the parks are people. Rather than communicating with audiences under the Twitter handle of @DisneyParks or @WaltDisneyWorld as a corporation, the approach should shift to something more personal. These cast members working on Disney social media channels likely have a passion for Disney just like its audiences do, so they should share that together. Creating content that shares the good that Disney parks do and that celebrates in the joys of its audiences is critical to continuing that sense of wonder beyond the parks and right into people’s homes.

Content Ideas

To conclude my analysis on @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld's use of social media, I would like to offer some insights into trends that performed well and how those trends can be implemented into social media strategy to focus more closely on building relationships with audiences in posts that are important to audiences and Disney's strategic messaging goals.

One high-performing trend discussed above is featuring cast members that park guests may know or be familiar with. One dialogic communication strategy could be featuring a cast member working at the main entrance of Disneyland. Each time someone visit Disneyland, they are welcomed by a main entrance cast member, so this is a familiar role to audiences. The tweet could be a video compilation of the cast member asking guests what they are most excited to explore in the park today and would be accompanied by a caption like "Rosa, a Disneyland main entrance cast member, learns all about what people are excited to do in Disneyland today. Let us know what the first thing you do when you visit Disneyland is in the comments!" By combining a well-known cast member role and asking audiences to think of their favorite things to do in Disneyland, the posting account could drive conversation toward happy memories of the parks and pull at audiences' nostalgia to return.

As seen in the interaction metrics, posts featuring animals had very high engagement. Another strategy to encourage dialogues between Disney Twitter accounts and audiences would be to share the photos of animals in the parks – whether that animal be from Animal Kingdom, working on Main Street U.S.A or living in The Seas exhibit – and then relate them to another area of interest for audiences: Disney media.

For example, a post could share a photo of a meerkat and a warthog in Animal Kingdom and ask audiences what the names of these two characters are in Walt Disney Animation Studio's *The Lion King*. To keep the conversation going, the posting account could then ask an audience member who answered correctly what song they sing together in the movie. Thus, Disney will have created a mutual relationship with the audience member about Disney Parks and media and will have shown a sustained interest in what audiences had to say.

Bringing Disney magic to guests unable to visit the parks in person also offers the opportunity to create dialogues that can keep guests involved in the parks without actually visiting them in person. Since @DisneyParks posts about content relating to all of the Disney resorts, they could share four photos of Disney castles and ask audiences to share what their favorite castle is or ask how many of these castles they have been to. @WaltDisneyWorld could share a video of the Dapper Dans – a performance group on Main Street – singing a new song and encourage audiences to comment which Disney song they would like to see the Dapper Dans perform next. They could reply to some audience suggestions that the Dapper Dans could perform, and then follow this up with the group actually performing an audience request. This encourages mutual relationships between Disney Twitter accounts and their audiences because audiences are treated as equals. Their requests and suggestions can be translated to in-park activity, making them feel like they are in the parks even if they can't be physically present.

A specific tweet setup that performed well was from @DisneyParks in celebration of National Hamburger Day. On May 28, 2020, @DisneyParks shared a

tweet early in the morning of a cute GIF of a hamburger and the caption “Today we are celebrating Hamburger Day! What’s your favorite burger from Disney parks?” As per the typical trend of dialogic communication with this account, many people responded with no follow-up in the replies from @DisneyParks. This tweet received over 70% more replies than the average number of replies for a @DisneyParks tweet, indicating that this was a conversation audiences wanted to have. Later in the day, @DisneyParks followed up that post with a collage of burgers – some that were currently offered and some that were a blast from the past – from across the Disney parks, as well as linking an article in the Disney Parks Blog with a longer form editorial on the burgers. I think this setup of asking a question early in the day and then following up hours later with more information could be useful in communicating corporate social responsibility initiatives across the Disney parks. Though CSR-related posts did not perform particularly well (see Table 4), sharing initiatives likely aligns with Disney strategic messaging goals. For example, if @WaltDisneyWorld wished to share information about its solar panel facility that exists on property, they could start the day with a tweet captioned something like this: “Did you that Walt Disney World has 500,000 solar panels on property? It’s part of our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint by relying on renewable energy to power our parks. Can you guess what shape all of the solar panels create?” Below, there would be an interactive poll with options such as “Mickey Mouse” (the correct answer), “Figment”, “Minnie Mouse” and “Donald Duck.” Later in the day, @WaltDisneyWorld could post that the correct answer was Mickey Mouse (including a photo of the panels), share more information about how much energy the panels save and include a link to a Disney Parks Blog post with more

information. Audiences would be able to interact with the CSR efforts happening around the park, and some users may even be interested enough to learn more about it and click on the Disney Parks Blog link.

In all of these strategies, it must be reiterated that to truly facilitate conversations and relationships with audiences, replying to comments is essential. This is where corporations have the opportunity to express their brand identity and their personality on social media. Wendy's isn't as well-known for its content as it is for its responses to other users, and the same goes for many other corporations.

Corporations, by committing to behave more like people than information distribution channels, create relationships with audiences that are excited about their mission and these relationships facilitate positive dialogues about the corporation. Really, this study comes down to communicating more like a person than corporation. It's about building connections on a platform that was designed for those connections.

Appendix

Appendix A: Codebook

Q1: What account is this tweet from?

@DisneyParks

Tweet posted on the @DisneyParks Twitter account.

@WaltDisneyWorld

Tweet posted on the @WaltDisneyWorld Twitter account.

Q2: What time frame is this tweet from?

I am interested in learning what communication efforts before and after the reopening of Walt Disney World looked like, so I will be examining tweets 60 days before and after the reopening date of all four parks on July 15, 2020. The purpose of this time frame is not to examine messaging specific to the Walt Disney World reopening, but it rather marks a shift from communication in a COVID-19 stricken world to a Disney with half of its parks reopened, including its largest and most visited resort Walt Disney World (Statista).

Pre-opening (31-60 days before)

Tweets posted from May 16, 2020, through June 14, 2020.

Pre-opening (1-30 days before)

Tweets posted from June 15, 2020, through July 14, 2020.

Opening Day

Tweets posted on July 15, 2020.

Post-opening (1-30 days after)

Tweets posted from July 16, 2020 through August 14, 2020.

Post-Opening (31-60 days after)

Tweets posted from August 15, 2020 through September 13, 2020.

Q3: What date was this tweet published?

This is the date that the tweet was posted on the Twitter account, found at the top of the tweet next to the account handle (@DisneyParks or @WaltDisneyWorld).

Q4: What is the assigned tweet number?

This tweet number is correlated with a link to the tweet located in a separate document. This code is primarily for internal use, so I can refer back to tweets and locate examples of trends that I find.

Q5: How many replies?

This number is found at the bottom left section of the tweet and indicates how many individual replies there are to the tweet. This number includes tweets from external accounts and the posting account itself. It is a measure of the total number of replies, not the total number of accounts replying.

Q6: How many retweets?

This number refers to the number of accounts that retweeted and quote tweeted the post and is found in the bottom center of the tweet. It is the total of these two measures, not only the retweets.

Q7: How many likes?

This number refers to the number of accounts that liked the tweet and is found at the bottom right of the tweet.

Q8: Does this tweet contain a photo or video?

Yes; photo

This code includes tweets that include photos that are not auto-populated by links. Photos can be understood in this context as static images, whether they be graphics or photographs. If the tweet is a quote of another account's tweet, it can be considered to have a photo if the original tweet includes one.

Yes; video

This code includes videos, whether they are GIFs, Boomerangs or traditional videos. If the tweet is a quote of another account's tweet, it can be considered to have a video if the original tweet includes one.

No

This code indicates that there is no photo or video attached to the tweet. If a tweet has a link that populates the space where an image would be, it would be coded as "No".

Q9: How many hashtags?

This number refers to the number of hashtags (#) used in the language of the tweet. These hashtags should be clickable links that take the user to other tweets that used the same hashtag. If the tweet is a quote of another account's tweet, only count the hashtags used in the original text from Walt Disney World or Disney Parks.

Q10: How many other accounts are mentioned?

A mention of another account can be understood as the use of @ followed by another active twitter account that links directly to that page. It will not be considered a mention if the account of the person or organization is not linked. If the tweet is a quote of another account's tweet, only count the mentions used in the original text from Walt Disney World or Disney Parks.

Q11: Does the tweet include a link?

Yes

The tweet contains a link that takes the user to an external site. The link can be full length or shortened as a bit.ly link. It also does not need to populate the space for photos for the "Yes" code to be applied. If the tweet is a quote of another account's tweet, only count links used in the original text from Walt Disney World or Disney Parks.

No

There is no link in the tweet. No external site can be accessed through the tweet.

Q12: What category does this tweet fall into?

Human Feature

This code refers to tweets that feature people that bring magic to the parks, whether it be cast members or guests. This code should be used when the person is the main focus of the tweet, not a supporting piece to a larger message. For example, a piece highlighting a recipe of a park-favorite food offering made by a specific cast member would be coded as a “Resort Offering” because the tweet is more focused on the recipe rather than the cast member. However, a tweet highlighting a cast member that works on developing COVID-19 safety precautions would be coded as “Human Feature” because the focus is the cast member and what they do is supplementary to the feature.

Animal Feature

This code references tweets that highlight animals that live in the parks. Some of these animals are part of the park experience, like wildlife in Animal Kingdom or Clydesdale horses that carry the trolleys up and down Main Street. Other animals are ones that call the Disney Parks a home, but do not necessarily serve as an attraction to visit. An example of these animals would be the ducks that paddle in the ponds of the parks. Tweets in this category feature the animals specifically, not the attraction they live in. For example, a tweet referencing Kilimanjaro Safari that includes a photo of the elephants that live there would not be coded as an animal feature; it would be coded as a park offering because it is focused more on the attraction than the animal itself. A tweet

highlighting the birth of a rhinoceros, however, would be coded as an animal feature because it is more concerned with the animal rather than the attraction it lives in.

Park Offerings

This code will include tweets that feature activities or products exclusive to Disney parks. This includes resort attractions, architecture, characters, food and merchandise. Tweets that fall into this code must have the resort offering be the primary focus of the tweet rather than a secondary focus. For example, a tweet about the reopening of Hong Kong Disneyland and all of the attractions inside would be coded under “Reopening”. A tweet highlighting the castle at Hong Kong Disneyland on the day of its reopening would be coded as “Park Offerings” because it is primarily focused on the castle that can only be visited in the park. Tweets highlighting recipes from in the park are another example of a “Park Offerings” code.

Holiday

This code refers to tweets celebrating holidays, whether they are national, religious or informal holidays. National holidays would include New Year’s day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. Religious holidays would include Christmas, Hannukah, Passover, Diwali, Kwanza or any other holidays associated with a religious group. Informal holidays range from nationally celebrated days like Halloween, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day to holidays that exist primarily on social media, like National Dog Day or National Popcorn Day. For the purposes of my research, an informal holiday can be recognized as a day that is specified in the tweet language as being different from an

average day, including anniversaries. A tweet highlighting Pluto the dog in the park, for example, would be coded as “Park Offerings”. A tweet highlighting Pluto the dog for National Dog Day, however, would be coded as “Holiday”.

Reopening

This code refers to tweets in which the main focus is the reopening of stores or theme parks that had closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also included in this code are posts that share information about safety procedures put in place to try and minimize the spread of COVID-19 when previously-closed locations reopen. The reopening of a location or the safety features put in place should be the primary focus of the tweet, not supporting information.

CSR-related

This code refers to posts that are related to The Walt Disney Company’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions. CSR activities include donations to nonprofit organizations, changes meant to improve employee/cast member work environments, park operations meant to improve accessibility and efforts to be more inclusive to diverse audiences in resort operations.

No Park Affiliation

This code refers to tweets that are related to a Walt Disney entity, but are not related to Disney Parks news. This could be tweets about Disney+, Disney Cruise Lines or Disney Animation Studios. These are all divisions of the Walt Disney Company, but they do not necessarily relate to park news.

Q13: Does this tweet contain dialogic elements?

Yes; asking a question

Tweets in this code should ask audiences a direct question that they could then answer in the comments. There do not need to be any responses to the question for a tweet to be coded as asking a question.

Yes; responding to a comment(s)

This code indicates that the posting account replied directly to a comment on one of its tweets.

Yes; interactive elements

This code indicates that there are interactive elements embedded in the tweet or available when a user clicks on a tweet link. A poll would be an interactive element embedded in the tweet that audiences could vote on. Other interactive elements could be events or activities that audiences are invited to participate in by the posting account if they follow a link. For example, a tweet inviting audiences to learn how to draw a character via a drawing tutorial that can be accessed by clicking on the posted link would be considered interactive because audiences have an opportunity to participate in something and then share it with the posting account. Another example of an interactive element would be sharing a recipe and inviting guests to try to make it. In order for a post to be considered dialogic, however, an invitation to interact with the tweet specifically needs to be extended plainly to the audience (not implied participation).

No

There are none of the dialogic elements listed above in the tweet.

Q14: What is the tone of replies?

Mostly Positive

This code will be used when most users express excitement or pleasure about the content of the tweet or a source unrelated to the content of the tweet. If there are 10 or fewer replies, a tweet coded “Mostly Positive” indicates that five or more of the replies are positive. If the tweet has over 10 replies, I will not be able to read all of the replies and determine the percentage of negative and positive comments. I will instead read replies and use my own judgement to determine the overall tone of the tweet replies.

Neutral

This code will be used for tweets that show that there are replies, but the replies are unavailable. Replies could be unavailable because the user deleted the tweet or the tweet is protected, meaning the user has protected tweets enabled in their profile. If there are 10 or fewer replies, a tweet coded “Neutral” indicates that five of the replies express positive feedback and five of the replies express negative feedback. If the tweet has over 10 replies, I will not be able to read all of the replies and determine the percentage of negative and positive comments. I will instead read replies and use my own judgement to determine the overall tone of the tweet replies.

Mostly Negative

This code will be used when most users are expressing negative emotions about the content of the tweet or a source unrelated to the tweet content. If there are 10 or fewer replies, a tweet coded “Mostly Negative” indicates that five or more of the replies are negative in nature. If the tweet has over 10 replies, I will not be able to read all of the replies and determine the percentage of negative and positive comments. I will instead read replies and use my own judgement to determine the overall tone of the tweet replies.

No Replies

This code will be used when the tweet has no replies to determine the tone of. It is different from a “Neutral” code in which the replies are unavailable because it indicates that no users responded to the tweet at all.

Q15: Include any additional notes (i.e. if this tweet is an outlier, duplicate posts or any notable replies)

This is where I will note any additional items of interest about the tweet. An outlier would be a tweet that receives significantly more or significantly less engagement than what I’ve see in other tweets. Duplicate posts are tweets that use the same verbiage and additional media (photo, video or link) as a post from another account. I will also include any replies that I think are relevant to determining the tone of tweets for the period or I think could have been an opportunity to engage in conversation with audiences.

Appendix B: Coding Sheet



What account is this tweet from?

@DisneyParks

@WaltDisneyWorld

What time frame is this tweet from?

Pre-opening (31-60 days before)

Pre-opening (1-30 days before)

Opening Day

Post-opening (1-30 days after)

Post-opening (31-60 days after)

What date was this tweet published?

What is the assigned tweet number?

How many replies?

How many retweets?

How many likes?

Does the tweet contain a photo or video?

Yes; photo

Yes; video

No

How many hashtags?

How many other accounts are mentioned?

Does the tweet include a link?

Yes

No

What category does this tweet fall into?

Human Feature

Animal Feature

Resort Offerings

Holiday

Reopening Update

CSR-Related

No Park Affiliation

Does this tweet contain dialogic elements?

Yes; asking a question

Yes; responding to a comment(s)

Yes; posting interactive content

No

What is the tone of replies?

Mostly positive

Neutral

Mostly negative

No replies

Include any additional notes (i.e. if the tweet is an outlier, duplicate post, any notable replies)



Appendix C: Tweet Tracking Sheet

When finding tweets in this tracker, they @DisneyParks will be abbreviated as DP and @WaltDisneyWorld will be abbreviated as WDW. Therefore, WDW #15 can be found in the Walt Disney World column and is hyperlinked to the number 15.

Walt Disney World	Disney Parks
1 A	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9 A	9
10	10
11 A B C	11
12	12 A
13	13 A B C
14	14
15	15
16	16
17	17
18 A	18
19	19
20	20
21	21
22	22 A
23	23
24	24
25 A	25
26	26 A

<u>27</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>28</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>29</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>30</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>31</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>32</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>33</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>34</u>	<u>34</u>
<u>35</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>36</u>	<u>36</u>
<u>37</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>38</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>39</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>A</u>	
<u>40</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>41</u>	<u>41</u>
<u>A</u>	
<u>B</u>	
<u>C</u>	
<u>42</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>43</u>	<u>43</u>
<u>A</u>	
<u>44</u>	<u>44</u>
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<u>60</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>61</u>	<u>61</u>
<u>62</u>	<u>62</u>
	<u>A</u>
	<u>63</u>
	<u>64</u>

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	135
	136
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	141
	142
	143
	144

The color coding of each cell correlates to which time period the tweet was from. The light blue is from pre-opening (31-60 days before), the darker blue is from pre-opening (30-1 day(s) before), the dark red is from post-opening (1-30 days after) and the lighter red is from post-opening (31-60 days after). There is a significant lapse in posting immediately before and immediately after Walt Disney World opened. I propose that this is because most of the tweets preceding the opening were receiving a large volume of negative comments. These comments could typically be divided into three categories. The first and smallest category was guests excited to return to the parks, no matter what regulations they had to abide by. Second and much larger were guests that wanted to return to the parks, but said they refused to do so with the safety precautions (like masks and social distancing) that were being put in place. The third and largest group was those who did not think it was safe that Walt Disney World was opening at all. This group was very vocal about how dangerous they thought it was for Walt Disney World to open, and their frustrations are the likely cause of the resulting silence of @DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld.

Appendix D: Tweet Examples

Example 1: Disney Parks Tweet 75

← Tweet

 **Disney Parks** 
@DisneyParks

We're thrilled to share Splash Mountain at [@Disneyland](#) & [@WaltDisneyWorld](#) will be completely reimagined with a new story inspired by an all-time favorite [@DisneyAnimation](#) film, "The Princess and the Frog." Learn about what Imagineers have in development: bit.ly/3hUYOGq



9:17 AM · Jun 25, 2020 · Sprout Social

22.8K Retweets 13.4K Quote Tweets 74.2K Likes

Example 2: International Dog Day (Disney Parks Tweets 117, 119, 120)

 **Disney Parks** ✓
@DisneyParks

In honor of [#InternationalDogDay](#), get to know some of our cast members & their favorite four-legged friends, rescue pups & service dogs with past pictures on the Disney Parks Blog! What's the name of your best furiend? [bit.ly/2YAgOmp](#) [#DisneyMagicMoments](#) [#NationalDogDay](#)



6:59 AM · Aug 26, 2020 · Sprout Social

64 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 351 Likes

 **Disney Parks** ✓
@DisneyParks

We've rounded up photos of Mickey's multi-mutt pal Pluto visiting Disney destinations around the world! 🐶
🌟 Where have you spotted Pluto? Share your favorite photos with us now using [#DisneyMagicMoments](#)! 🐾
[bit.ly/2EFDs5S](#) [#NationalDogDay](#) [#InternationalDogDay](#)



1:59 PM · Aug 26, 2020 · Sprout Social

179 Retweets 11 Quote Tweets 970 Likes

Example 3: Disney Parks Tweet 12 and response A



It's time to raid your closet for a little Disney fashion, as you practice Disney bounding at home and find your "Frozen"-fractally ❄️ looks from #Frozen2! Share yours with ✨ #DisneyMagicMoments bit.ly/2To6R90



10:57 AM · May 20, 2020 · Sprout Social

40 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 219 Likes

← Tweet



Replying to @ElliotJGMinto and @DisneyParks

Sorted!!



11:04 AM · May 20, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

3 Likes

Example 4: Disney Parks Tweet 138

← Tweet



Disney Parks 
@DisneyParks



What in the world...or in the galaxy could this attraction be? Set your launch trajectory for the stars and you'll eventually come to orbit the right answer. [#DisneyMagicMoments](#) ✨



7:59 AM · Sep 7, 2020 · Sprout Social

62 Retweets 9 Quote Tweets 630 Likes

Example 5: Disney Parks Tweet 125 and response A

← Tweet

Disney Parks 
@DisneyParks

In honor of the first anniversary of Star Wars: [#GalaxysEdge](#) at [@WaltDisneyWorld](#) Resort, we're sharing the recipe for the Cliff Dweller, a non-alcoholic drink from Oga's Cantina, usually served in the cutest vessel in the galaxy: bit.ly/3bdm3xm
[#DisneyMagicMoments](#)



9:07 AM · Aug 31, 2020 · Sprout Social

140 Retweets 27 Quote Tweets 871 Likes

← Tweet

Lauren
@flippiefloppies

Replying to [@DisneyParks](#) and [@WaltDisneyWorld](#)

Delicious! Excited to make one at home using my mug!



9:09 AM · Aug 31, 2020 · Twitter for Android

4 Likes

Tables

Table 1: Tweet Engagement

	Total	Disney Parks	@WaltDisneyWorld	Dialogic	Non-Dialogic
Replies	45	45.7	43.5	15.4	48.1
Retweets	372.6	440.9	212.8	94.2	401.0
Likes	1399.6	1,411.8	1371.2	619.3	1,497.0

@DisneyParks averaged more interaction in replies, retweets and likes than @WaltDisneyWorld. Tweets including dialogic elements averaged less interaction than tweets that did not include dialogic communication.

Table 2: Tweet Engagement (without @DisneyParks tweet #75)

	Total	@DisneyParks	@WaltDisneyWorld	Dialogic	Non-Dialogic
Replies	28.7	22.4	43.5	15.4	30.1
Retweets	197.7	191.2	212.8	94.2	208.4
Likes	1044.7	904.2	1371.2	619.3	1089.1

@DisneyParks tweet #75 received incredibly high interaction levels because it went viral. This table examines interaction levels without this tweet, and it is seen that @WaltDisneyWorld receives more interaction in replies, retweets and likes.

Table 3: Tone of Tweets Using and Not Using Dialogic Communication

	Dialogic Elements	No Dialogic Elements
Mostly Positive	85%	59.6%
Neutral	10%	14.9%
Mostly Negative	5%	25.5%

Table 4: Tweet Engagement by Category (without tweet 75)

	Animal Feature	Resort Offerings	Reopening Updates	Human Feature	Holiday	No Park Affiliation	CSR-Related
Replies	47.4	27.2	33.0	47.7	17.6	8.4	4.2
Retweets	291.0	214.2	224.6	215.9	203.9	81	47.2
Likes	1783.6	1214.5	1177.5	1020.2	910.6	418.3	260.6

Table 5: Rankings of Most Engaged-With Categories

Average across three metrics	Average Replies	Average Retweets	Average Likes
Animal Feature	Human Feature	Animal Feature	Animal Feature
Resort Offerings	Animal Feature	Reopening Update	Resort Offerings
Reopening Update	Reopening Update	Human Feature	Reopening Update
Human Feature	Resort Offerings	Resort Offerings	Human Feature
Holiday	Holiday	Holiday	Holiday
No Park Affiliation	No Park Affiliation	No Park Affiliation	No Park Affiliation
CSR-Related	CSR-Related	CSR-Related	CSR-Related

The “average across three metrics” column is all three engagement metric averages added together. This number helps measure how many accounts are interacting with the post, through certain metrics hold different weights of importance. Tweets typically receive more likes than replies or retweets, so resort offerings has a higher average engagement despite being consistently ranked third or fourth in each individual metric. Replies are also more indicative of engagement than retweets and likes are but since there are so few replies, they are not as significant in determining the average interaction across categories.

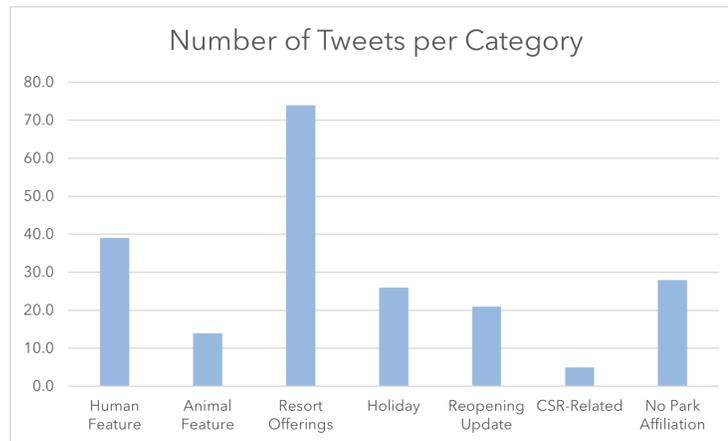
Table 6: Tone in Dialogic and Non-Dialogic Tweets

	Dialogic	Non-Dialogic
Mostly Positive	85%	59.6%
Neutral	10%	14.9%
Mostly Negative	5%	25.5%

Dialogic tweets typically received more positive replies than tweets that included non-dialogic elements.

Figures

Figure 1: Number of Tweets per Category



@DisneyParks and @WaltDisneyWorld tweeted most frequently about resort offerings and least often about corporate social responsibility efforts.

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