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Mainstream News Organizations Aren't Very Good At Using Twitter, Study Finds

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By Anna Sanders 11/15 10:33am



(Photo: PaidContent.org)

The journalism community prides itself on its social media use, but a [study released yesterday](#) reveals that mainstream news organizations are using Twitter wrong, i.e. to advance their own material as opposed to engaging with readers and followers.

Researchers from The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism and The George Washington University's School of Media and Public Affairs examined over 3,600 tweets over the course of a week last February (Feb. 14-20, 2011) and found that those news organizations used the social media site to promote their own editorial content. The study concluded that "sharing

of outside content and engagement with followers are rare."

The study found that most of the 13 main Twitter accounts had a similar focus, promoting the organizations own work with links *hopefully* sending followers back to their websites. On the main accounts, 93 percent linked to a news story on the organization's website. While it makes economic sense that news organizations will promote their websites on Twitter, it's possible to do both: *New York Daily News* regularly [asks followers to send pictures and comments over Twitter](#).

Some other highlights of the study:

- A lot of the news organizations had [multiple accounts](#). With 98 to choose from, *The Washington Post* was on top. *The Observer* likes the idea of multiple accounts for niche blogs (check out [@Betabeat](#)), but Civil War WaPo ([@CivilWarwp](#)) is a bit excessive.
- Civil War accounts aside, *The Washington Post's* main organization account tweeted the most (664 different tweets during the week), followed by *The Huffington Post* (415 tweets) and *The New York Times* (391). Cable news networks tweeted the least.

- Only 2 percent of tweets from main feeds were “information-gathering in nature.”
- *Fox News* retweeted **the most of the 13 organizations studied**, while *The New York Times* didn’t use the retweet function at all. In fact, 44 percent of *Fox News*’ tweets were retweets during the sample week in February.
- Researchers also **examined the feeds of 13 individual journalists** (the most followed at each news organization) and found that only 3 percent asked for information and only 6 percent of their tweets were retweets of outside institutions. (**Guilty.**)
- The study found that health reporters make use of Twitter as a reporting tool more than any other beat, with 6 percent of health reporters’ tweets soliciting information. Hey, it’s better than nothing.

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