



X-THREADS AS A LEARNING STIMULUS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The article elucidates the manner in which marketing-related university students enrich their knowledge through the social network X (formerly Twitter). By examining existing literature and conducting student surveys, it is possible to ascertain whether these platforms act as a stimulus to further learning, or whether they merely serve as a conduit for information that begins and ends with the individual, without motivating the student to engage in further research. The results offer a critical analysis of their role in the learning process, identifying the impact they have on students.

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1. Literature

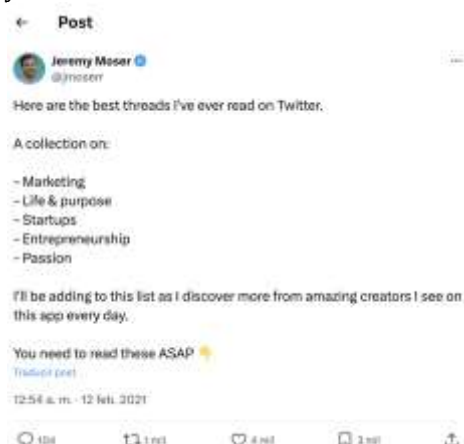
The narrative structures that emerge from social networks are not solely dependent on the initial publication of a post; the threads (De Ramón Carrión, 2017) that result from interactions with the main content also play a role in the evolution of the message that is intended to be communicated. The case of Twitter (now known as "X") is no exception. Indeed, this social network has been a pioneer in the development of this type of storytelling (Fog et al., 2005; González-Bengoechea et al., 2023). To this end, the naming of its current competitor, Threads, a social network created from Meta and powered on Instagram, is indicative of the aforementioned market segment.

The following entities have been identified as relevant to this study: large, medium and small companies (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2008), public institutions (Subirats, 2001), journalistic companies (Cea, 2010), information professionals (García et al., 2015). In these narrative spaces, influencers (De la Piedra & Meana, 2017) or conventional users interact in order to generate a story that serves as an active part of their brand image (Baños & Rodríguez, 2012; Góngora & Lavilla, 2020). Consequently, the tweet (now post) serves not only to enable the sender of the message to attempt to generate a communication in any social media platform (Carballar, 2012), but also to facilitate joint analysis of the intention to narrate.

This marketing strategy can be considered to be analogous to the concept of "buzz" as defined by Ocaña (2006). It can also be viewed as an example of the prosumer (Toffler, 1980) or crossuser (Alegre, 2016) phenomenon. In this context, the brand is constructed collectively through the posts that the author writes in the node. This process allows for the development of a message that can be exported to other media, becoming part of a cross-media strategy (Sánchez and Otero, 2012). In this context, the main actor can create liquid content on one platform while simultaneously engaging with other platforms, leveraging the impact and reach of their comments within the thread.

Indeed, it can be observed that the communication actions of numerous brands, whether personal or corporate, are motivated by the activity that has been carried out in the thread. Two notable examples of this phenomenon are worthy of mention. One such example was carried out by Jeremy Moser, co-founder and CEO of uSERP, a digital search and branding agency for enterprise technology startups, as well as executive vice president of Wordable – a company he acquired in 2020 – and director of Copycourse.io, a company with great fame in the sector that was created to teach copywriting to hundreds of students every year. Moser himself, from his account @jmoser, implemented the marketing strategy known as "the thread of threads," which could also be referred to as a "meta-thread," by creating a list of individuals whom he deemed to be the most accomplished in a specific field and who had engaged with the publication on more than three thousand occasions. The same number of times the platform user saved it among his favourite posts and received four thousand likes (Giachanou & Crestani, 2016).

Image 1. Jeremy Moser's 2021 thread dubbed as "the thread of threads".



Source: X @jmoser, (<https://twitter.com/jmoserr/status/1360014458962075648>).

Another example that corroborates this assertion is the account of Naval Ravikant (@naval), an American investor and entrepreneur, who in 2018 published a thread in which he published a recipe book to become a millionaire. This generated a great deal of interest and activity among readers. Indeed,

the initial post alone attracted nine thousand comments, was shared eighty-four thousand times, and was saved by one hundred and thirty thousand users for later reading.

Image 2. Naval Ravikant's 2018 thread, explaining how to get rich.



Source: X @naval, (<https://twitter.com/naval/status/1002103360646823936>).

The action may appear simplistic or uninspiring, yet there is a rationale for its inclusion. This type of publication utilises the abbreviation of language in the post in order to gradually offer brief messages that aim to stimulate public interest through their clarity and conciseness. Furthermore, the publication allows for the interaction of prosumers with content that is developed narratively, with the different messages directed by the account owner appearing in the various sections.

The style is characterised by a certain simplicity, and frequently emulates the style employed by journalists in the writing of headlines for information they produce. In this manner, the author employs concise language and rhetorical devices, such as ellipsis, metaphor, personification, paradox, and metonymy (Cervera, 2016), to capture the reader's attention and engage them with the content.

Furthermore, the author of the message employs a pragmatic grammatical structure in these headlines, on occasion incorporating ideological elements, as Van Dijk (2003) asserts. Consequently, the speaker himself is responsible for interpreting the posts, thereby provoking further controversy within the conversation (p.68).

In the context of the field of communication, and more specifically that which concerns the world of journalism, this type of narrative generation offers an option for dialogue between the creator of the thread and the individuals who interact with the story. It also encompasses the action of content curation (Wang et al., 2020), whereby, in addition to developing one's own story, one can interact with another that has been created previously and, from it, establish the narrative proposal. In other words, a link or a post created by a third party can also be used to generate a story with engagement (Martí & Muñoz, 2008). However, for this action to be effective, a series of recommendations can be derived from the journalistic use of X, with the aim of ensuring that the action of the thread itself has positive effects among users.

Consequently, the selection and frequency of publications, recommendations of their own content or content produced by third parties with media influence (experts, analysts, opinion leaders, bloggers, citizen groups, official sources, etc.), verification of data and information, reporting of fraudulent information and recognition of the informative work created by people or institutions other than their own (López-Meri & Casero-Ripollés, 2017), are the principal criteria that communicators follow when attempting to gain credibility among their audience. It is also possible to establish another type of narrative that distances itself from the merely informative or opinionated: fictionalised content.

This type of narrative action, which is more akin to literature than to the merely informative or traditional advertising, is also one of the contents being offered in the threads of the X network. In Spain, the term "tuiteratura" (Ayala & Salgado, 2019) is used to describe this phenomenon.

A study was conducted to assess the creativity of users based on the threads of this social network. The study analysed more than 1,300 posts from 16 threads, generated two years before the pandemic and at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that more than seven million interactions were generated. Furthermore, the study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative

methodologies, including monitoring, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, to identify the various types of threads and their distinctive characteristics.

The findings indicated that X, Twitter at the time of the analysis, had the potential to facilitate the creation of both improvised narratives and planned stories, some of which were supported by audiovisual content. Similarly, this research demonstrated that the threads of this social network facilitated greater user interactivity in the proactive elaboration of stories (Castro-Martínez & Díaz-Morilla, 2021).

Consequently, whether the communication is informative or fictional, the sender offers greater simplicity and brevity when communicating. Furthermore, the prosumer, whether a “heavy user”, “medium user” or “light user” (Agüero & Lavilla, 2014; Mohd Suki, 2007), is afforded the opportunity to interact more proactively with the profile of the person he or she is following. An individual may transform into a drip storyteller with the objective of gaining followers through the dissemination of objective and real facts, or fictitious events that may even be about to happen.

2. Objectives

The objective of this article is to investigate the impact of news threads on the social network X (formerly known as Twitter) on the learning experiences of students pursuing careers in marketing, information sciences, and business administration. In this context, a thread can be defined as “the chaining of a variable number of tweets dealing with the same topic in a single account” (De-Ramon-Carrion, 2017).

In light of the above, it is necessary to ascertain whether the X-threads act as a catalyst for further learning in subjects related to the aforementioned careers, or whether they merely serve as a source of information that does not encourage learners to pursue further research.

In order to achieve this, the following research objectives have been defined:

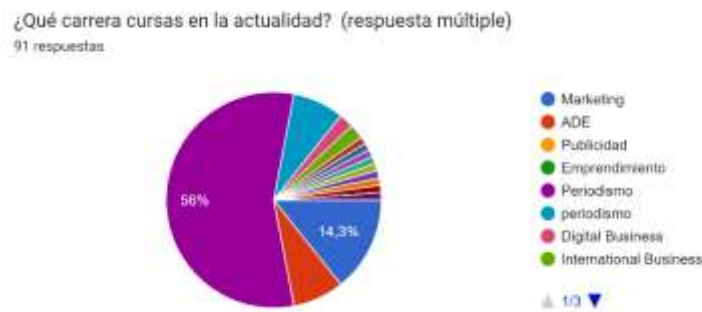
- To identify the impact that the X-threads have on students in terms of their understanding and retention of knowledge.
- To provide information on the role of these threads within the range of information sources available to students in these disciplines.

3. Methodology

In order to conduct this research article, we proceeded to read the existing documentation, which was complemented by conducting surveys among a group of students belonging to the journalism, marketing, business administration, and digital business courses.

As part of the quantitative research, a questionnaire was distributed to 91 students enrolled in the aforementioned courses. The data was collected by means of an online form, which was completed by the students. This enabled the researchers to ascertain the students' behaviour in relation to X's news threads.

The questionnaire comprises three thematic sections, the first of which examines the extent and nature of the respondents' utilisation of the social network X (formerly Twitter). In the second block, students are asked about their level of knowledge and use of news threads on X. In the third block, the questionnaire explores how news threads can provide knowledge to university students of journalism, marketing, business administration and digital business.

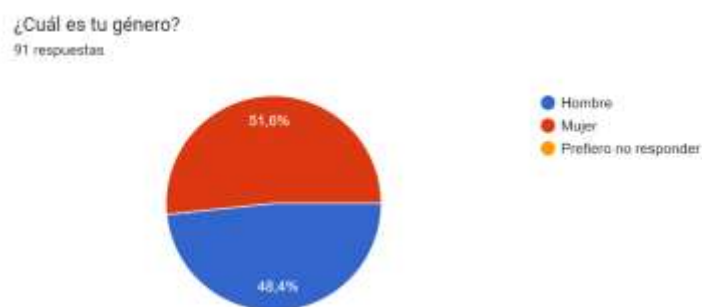
Figure 1. Career path taken by students

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The research was created using Google Forms, which allows for the dissemination of the results by telematic means and the acquisition of numerical and graphical data in a structured and agile manner. The form provides information about the role of X threads as a learning incentive for students. The form can be accessed via the following link: <https://forms.gle/6xG5y2w4ucE42Ewh6>.

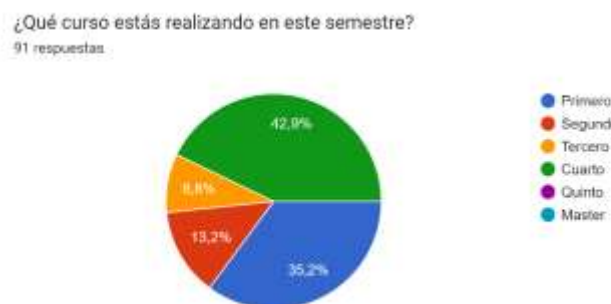
The participants selected for this study were 91 students from any of the journalism, marketing, business administration, or digital business degree programmes at the following universities: The participating universities include Complutense University of Madrid, Francisco de Vitoria University, and ESIC University.

The age range of the interviewees is from 18 to 23 years old, with a relatively equal distribution of males and females.

Figure 2. Gender of students interviewed

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

A breakdown of the course that the interviewees are currently undertaking is provided below.

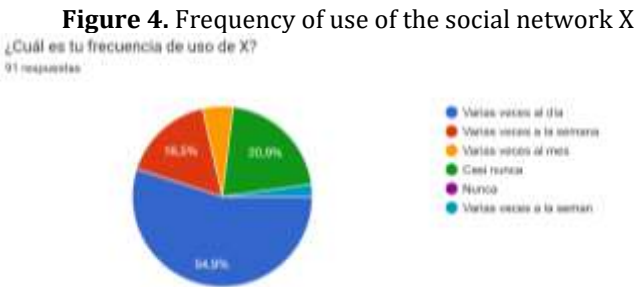
Figure 3. Course taken by surveyed students

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

4. Results

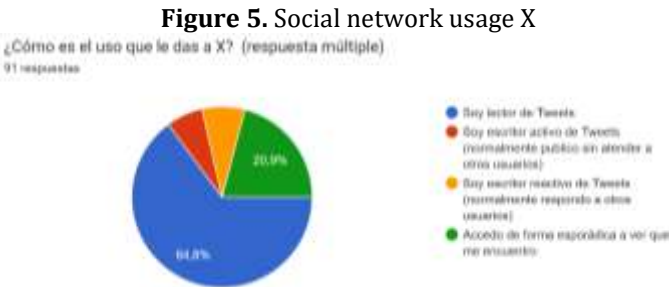
The data obtained from the completed forms has yielded certain results that offer insight into the role of X's information threads in the students' learning process. These results identify the imprint that X's information threads leave on students in terms of comprehension and retention of knowledge. They also provide conclusions on the role that X plays within the set of information sources available to the students questioned.

Most students surveyed (98.9%) currently have an active user on X, with an average length of time since registration of approximately four years. This indicates a high frequency of use, with 55% of users accessing it several times a day.



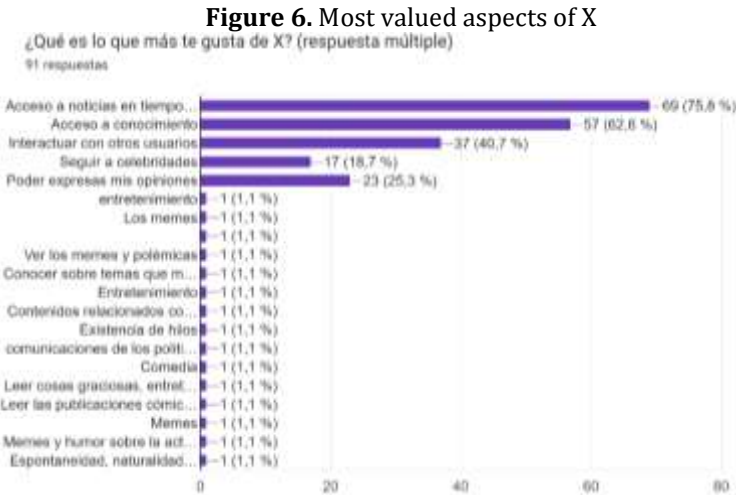
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The manner in which this group of users utilises social network X can be described as essentially passive. Indeed, 65% of users limit themselves to reading tweets posted by other users, rather than actively participating by generating content or opinions.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In terms of the social network X, 54% of users indicated a high level of satisfaction, while 7.7% expressed a high level of dissatisfaction. With regard to the most valued aspects of X, respondents highlighted those related to access to information in real time, the availability of high-value content, and the ability to express personal opinions.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In contrast, the least valued aspects of the social network are those related to fraudulent practices within X, which are primarily based on anonymity or on false or malicious information.

Figure 7. Under-valued aspects of X

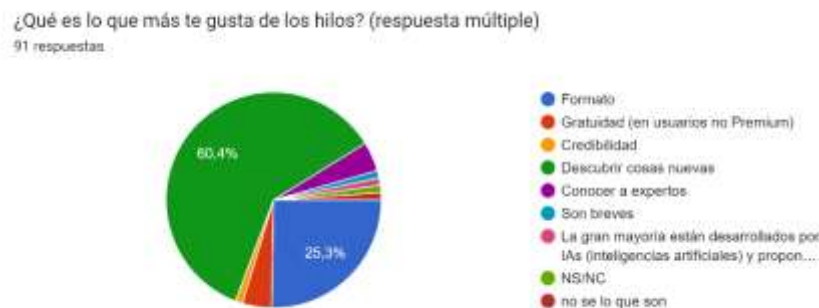


Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In relation to X threads, a significant proportion of respondents (90%+) are aware of them, with a notable number (54%) having read threads on multiple occasions. This percentage is comparable to that of students who claim to be able to locate threads containing relevant content. Furthermore, 61.5% of students consider X threads to be an extremely attractive way of accessing knowledge. In addition, 77% of the total number of students included in the research stated that the threads have helped them to increase their knowledge on certain topics. The students valued aspects such as learning new knowledge or accessing it through an attractive format.

The format prompts me to explore topics that I was previously unaware of and encourages me to conduct further research. (Marketing student).

Figure 8. Most valued aspects of X threads



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Conversely, 27.5% of the individuals surveyed indicated that they had ever created an information thread, with the primary motivation for doing so being to share knowledge with other individuals (16.5%). Regarding the ability of the threads to encourage students to engage in further research, a significant proportion (69%) of respondents indicated that they had done so. Furthermore, 81% of respondents indicated that these threads have enabled them to enhance their understanding of the degree programme they are pursuing.

Threads allow for the acquisition of additional knowledge through the linking and expansion of information, as well as the sharing of opinions, which facilitates the exploration of diverse perspectives (Journalism student).

Figure 9. Threads as a spur for further research



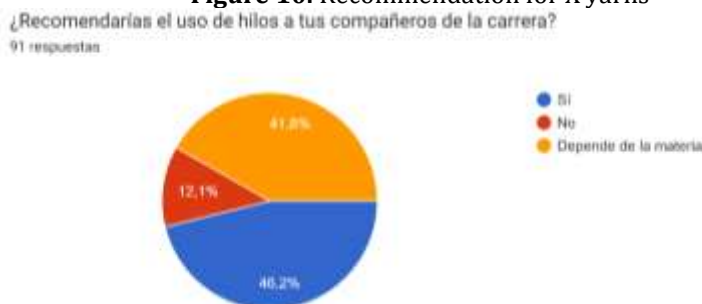
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In terms of identifying the principal sources to which students resort in order to expand their existing knowledge, the social network X itself emerges as the most frequently cited source.

"The threads contain explicit details that facilitate a deeper comprehension of the subject matter" (Journalism student).

Finally, it is pertinent to note that 88% of students would recommend the use of X-threads to their fellow students as a means of obtaining valuable information, with the majority expressing a positive recommendation.

Figure 10. Recommendation for X yarns



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

5. Discussion

The research findings permit the advancement of knowledge in various areas of the theoretical and practical framework proposed. The results demonstrate that the informative threads of X have a significant impact on the acquisition of knowledge by the students interviewed.

6. Conclusions

One of the initial findings of this research is that the social network X has a high degree of presence, use and acceptance among university students enrolled in degree courses related to communication, marketing and business administration. In this context, the most highly valued functionality of this social network is access to information, with students adopting a more passive role.

This argument can be further substantiated by the observation that students in these degree courses utilise X as a source of more specialised knowledge. In this context, information threads represent a rapid and effective means of accessing qualified information, encompassing both general and specific subjects related to university degrees. This is due to the simplicity and structured format of the reading format.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the research is the fact that more than two-thirds of the students interviewed stated that the threads on X serve as an incentive for them to delve deeper into the subject matter initially observed in the thread itself, becoming an element that motivates the students themselves to learn. In this context, the social network X emerges as the primary source of knowledge for students, suggesting that those who gain knowledge within the network tend to remain within the network's ecosystem when seeking to expand their knowledge.

7. Future Applications

The results of the surveys and subsequent data analysis have identified potential avenues for further research. These include:

- A more detailed exploration of the findings according to gender, grade and degree course, with a view to identifying any differences.
- An evaluation of the potential for information threads to become a source of payment for learners, in a manner similar to X Premium.
- To gain a deeper understanding of the academic perspective of teachers on the subject matter of the article through qualitative research focused on them.
- To identify the possibility of generating vertical channels with information threads related to the different university careers or specific subjects within them.

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