

Investigation of Micro-blogging Communication Patterns for Fashion Products: A
Content Analysis of Kiehl's Corporate Account on Sina Weibo in China

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

Juanjuan Wu

July 2012

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Prof. Juanjuan Wu for the continuous support of my master study and research, for her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my committee members: Prof. Kim Johnson and Prof. Marilyn Bruin, for their help, encouragement and insightful comments. My sincere thanks also go to Kaitlin Cassady, for helping me revising the draft of this paper. Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family: my husband Dr. Xiaotong Zhang and my parents, for supporting me spiritually throughout my life.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how Chinese micro-blogging is used by businesses. In this paper, I reported results of a case study investigating the communication and interaction among Kiehl's SINA Weibo account. I quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed 135 corporate posts, 2443 comments by followers and Kiehl's, and 400 customers' brand-related posts in micro-blogging. An object-action content coding scheme had been adopted for content analysis. The research findings showed that about 47% of all Kiehl's posts were related to products and over 42% were associated with brand; more than 54% of all followers' comments were about product and 35% were related to marketing. Detailed and informative posts focusing on different aspects of products attracted followers' attention and drove their engagement with the company and other followers in micro-blogging. Followers had a strong desire to participate in corporate-initiated online activities, since about 25% of followers' comments were for participating in this type of marketing activity, although only 6% of Kiehl's posts were related to marketing. More than 25% of followers' comments included a sentiment, either a positive expression (above 21%) or a negative expression (nearly 5%). Over 24% of all followers' comments were asking questions mainly about products, however Kiehl's only replied less than 28% of them which led to followers' dissatisfaction. In general, the more retail stores in a given location, the more followers there were. Sina Weibo can be considered as a crucial part of integrated marketing communication for businesses to build brand knowledge and brand relationship.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Social Media and Micro-blogging

Entering the Web 2.0 era, the rules and tools of communication are faced with a dramatic change. According to O'Reilly (2005) Web 2.0 describes a new phase of internet technology which has seven core competencies, including services but not packaged software, architecture of participation, cost-effective scalability, remixable data source and data transformations, software about the level of a single device, and harnessing of collective intelligence. People are in contact with others on a global basis, and technology constantly fuels this demand by a great number of communication innovations. Social media has been gaining popularity in recent years. It is becoming a driving new force that affects the way people communicate. The dominance of traditional communication where a message was controlled by businesses and delivered to its audience is being challenged. Social media tools have transformed the web from a one-way communication vehicle to a real-time and interactive medium. Williams and Williams (2008) stated that "the introduction of social media tools may be the most revolutionary change to communication since the introduction of the Internet" (p. 35).

Social media are online applications, platforms and media that aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and content sharing (Richter & Koch, 2007). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). The term often refers to

activities that integrate technology, communications and social interaction, and the construction of words, images, videos, and audio. As a result of the ubiquitously accessibility and scalability of communication technologies, social media has changed how organizations, communities, and individuals communicate tremendously (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

Businesses also refer to social media as user-generated content or consumer-generated media. Being different from traditional media, such as television, newspapers, radio, and magazines that provide one-way static communication, social media allows customers to interact with businesses rather than only being passive targets of marketing messages (Zarrella, 2010). The emergence of social media provides a new and different way of communication where consumers determine the content of message and have various accesses to share with hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people. Thus, social media is based upon a conversation between people about a subject of common interest (Scott, 2010).

One form of social media is micro-blog, such as Twitter the most popular micro-blogging service. As of March, 2012, Twitter has more than 140 million active users with over 340 million tweets per day (Weber, 2012). Micro-blogging allows users to send brief text updates (140 characters or fewer) or micro media (photos or audio clips) and publish them to be viewed by anyone. These messages can be submitted by a variety of approaches, such as text messaging, instant messaging, email, or the web (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Micro-blogging is a new form of social media communication in which

users can describe things of interest and express attitudes that they are willing to share with others in relatively short posts compared to other social media tools (e.g. social networking sites, blog).

1.2 Micro-blogging in China

Because of Chinese internet restrictions and regulations, Chinese users could not use Twitter in Mainland China. Thus, a Chinese micro-blogging site “SINA Weibo (literally means micro-blog, pronounced ‘way-bore’)” emerged in August, 2009. There are also other micro-blog platforms in China, but in this research paper, I took SINA Weibo as an example to explore the phenomenon of Chinese micro-blogging. iResearch, a leading online market research company, conducted an investigation for the Chinese micro-blog market in 2010. Their investigation showed that Sina Weibo comprised 56.5% of the market share on an active user basis and 86.6% of the market share on a browsing time basis. Sina Weibo is the current leader of micro-blogging services in China (“Sina Commands 56%”, 2011).

SINA Weibo has been used actively by many western corporations for micro-blogging marketing in China. For example, Nokia and Dell have seen the potential of micro-blogging as an advertising platform and are using their corporate micro-blogging to promote products. According to Nokia, at least 400,000 users “attended” an online event in 2010 that resulted in more than 1,000 orders for one new product. “Micro blogs provide a new tool for us to interact with our potential consumers here in China,” said by Weidong Yang, head of marketing for Nokia in China (Smith, 2010). The American

computer manufacturer Dell, which has already run successful marketing campaigns on Twitter in the U.S., has now set up its own corporate account on Sina Weibo. As of March 7th, 2012 this account (<http://weibo.com/dell>) had 150018 followers, and received thousands of visits and responses.

Although the effect of micro-blogging on marketing has been recognized by marketers, there is little research addressing micro-blogging. Java, Song, Finin and Tseng (2007) studied the topological and geographical properties of Twitter's social network. These researchers found that people were using micro-blogging to talk about their daily activities, to seek information, or to share opinions. In contrast to research, there are numerous popular press articles discussing how to use micro-blogging applications, mainly Twitter, for branding and brand-related purposes (i.e., Brogan, 2008; Postman, 2008; Thompson, 2008). Moreover, Li, Cao, J, L, and Y (2011) conducted an investigation to explore 22 official brand Micro-blogs on SINA Weibo by using the integrated method of content analysis and an in-depth interview. The samples of this study comes from the "apparels and fashion circle" among the brands hall on the SINA Weibo main page, including ADIDAS, ZARA, CLINIQUE, et al. They suggested that micro-blogging in China is highly associated with brands; Chinese business users of micro-blogging are acting as information-publishers, however they are relatively deficient in personal touch.

With an awareness of high business potential of Chinese market and the strong consumption power of Chinese customers, more and more western brands are making an

effort to expand their market into a larger and wider level. Rather than spending a great amount of money on commercial or advertising via different types of mass media, conducting a branding campaign on social media is an efficient way to stimulate consumers' attention and involvement, in virtue of the unique features of being interactive and low cost (Sui & Yang, 2010). As an effective channel to connect and interact with customers in a real time, micro-blogging drives tremendous attention of businesses from various industries, since it plays a crucial role in the whole process of marketing communication, from pre-purchase, to purchase, and then, to post-purchase (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

1.3 Objective and Significance of Research

Customers want companies to listen to their voices, engage with them, and respond to their inquiries appropriately (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This brings in a considerable challenge for businesses to change their focus from the traditional format of marketing communication to social media. However, micro-blogging is a double-edged sword, because anyone on the internet could spread negative message towards the brand and its products anonymously, which may generate a considerable damage on the brand and the company's interest (Zhang, 2011). In Web 2.0, it is crucial for companies to fully understand the essence of micro-blogging as a rising internet tool and the importance of micro-blog marketing as a part of overall marketing strategy, because micro-blogging could open the opportunity to use the social channels not only for communication, but

also as a good way to better understand the customers (Andrés del Valle & Dempski, 2009).

This research used a case study method. The purpose of this study is to help understand how Chinese micro-blogging is used by businesses, and offer insights into leveraging Sina Weibo as a crucial part of integrated marketing communication to build brand knowledge and brand relationship. The research questions addressed the following:

Question #1: What are the communication patterns (number, time and content) of corporate micro-blogging posts?

Question #2: What are communication patterns (number and content of comments, location of followers) of micro-blogging interactions between a company and its followers?

Question #3: What are communication patterns (content, users' micro-blogging behavior) of users' brand-related micro-blogging posts as electronic-Word-of-Month?

1.4 Definitions of Terms

- Micro-blogging: users can publish a brief text (140 characters or fewer) with photos or audio/video clips, and the content can be read by any other users
- Social media: variety of Internet-based applications which allows users to create and exchange user-generated content
- Corporate account: a micro-blog account created by a company on Sina Weibo for a commercial purpose

- Followers: anyone who clicks the “Following” button on the main page of a corporate account and automatically receives updates from this corporate account
- Repost: a function of micro-blogging to publish a post again
- Users: anyone who uses micro-blogging with an individual account for a personal purpose
- Brand-related posts: any individual user’s post contains the symbol “@” and “Corporate Account Name” (e.g. @Mr. Bone of Kiehl’s), which is used to notify a corporate account

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Media

2.1.1 Classification of Social Media Services

There are many different forms of social media technologies, including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, and video (Richter & Koch, 2007). By applying a set of theories in the field of media research (i.e. social presence, media richness) and social processes (i.e. self-presentation, self-disclosure), Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) created a classification scheme for different types of social media (shown in Table 1). According to this scheme, there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), that can be organized based on the degree of social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure. Many of these social media applications can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Table 1

Classification of Social Media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Social presence/Media richness				
		Low	Medium	High
Self-	High	Blogs and micro-	Social networking	Virtual social

presentation/		blogs (e.g., Blogger,	sites (e.g.,	worlds (e.g.,
Self-		Twitter)	Facebook)	Second Life)
disclosure	Low	Collaborative	Content	Virtual game
		projects (e.g.,	communities (e.g.,	worlds (e.g.
		Wikipedia)	Youtube, Flickr)	World of
				Warcraft)

2.1.2 Consumer Usage of Social Media

As the use of social media continues to grow and becomes prevalent, marketers are interested in a good understanding about how consumers are using social media. OnlineMBA.com published a comprehensive statistics summary on the usage of social media in the U.S. (Alexander, 2012). It showed that until 2012, Facebook as the most popular social media application had 845 million active users. The average user had 130 friends. The average visit lasted 23 minutes. About 46% of users were over the age of 45; 57% of users were female; 57% of users reported attended “some college” (24% bachelors or graduate degree); and, 47% of users reported making between \$50,000 – \$99,000 annually (33% between \$25,000 – \$49,999). Moreover, as of 2012 twitter had 127 million active users. The average visit on Twitter lasted for 14 minutes. There are nearly 54% of users used Twitter on their mobile devices, 36% tweeted at least once a day, and 59% of twitter users are female. Based on the number of users and the average time spent per day on these social media sites, one can see that social media has already

become an indispensable part of modern life and maybe consciously as well unconsciously influence on people's thinking and life style. In addition, Bernoff and Li (2008) examined the usage of various forms of social media by online Americans. They found that 25% of online Americans read blogs, and 7% write them; 29% percent watch user-generated video, and 8% upload user-generated video; 25% percent visit social networking sites; 18% participate in discussion forums; 25% percent read ratings and reviews.

The use of social media has grown dramatically across all age groups. However, there are differences in usage behavior between genders. More than one-half of the U.S. female internet users actively participated in some type of social media at least weekly (eMarketer.com, 2009). Chen (2009) also concluded that more women than men use social networks; 57 % of users of Twitter are women with the same percentage using Facebook, and 55 % of Flickr users are also women. Compass (2009) found that of the 79 million U.S. women online, more than 42 million of them are active with some type of social media in a weekly basis. Seventy-two percent of women surveyed log in their social networking sites at least once per day (SheSpeaks, 2009). It seems that men usually are early adopters of new technologies, but women are actively using social media, since "social media is less about technology and more about being social" (Lichtenberg, 2009). Lichtenberg (2009) concluded that the reasons women turn to social media include the natural need to share information about themselves (self-disclosure), develop self-awareness, build a relationship, and communicate with others to know what others think.

Not only becoming important in people's daily life for social networking, different types of social media are also playing a crucial role in consumers' perceptions and interactions with companies, such as acquiring customer service. Based on an analysis of customer service within social media conducted by Zendesk (2010), Facebook leads all social platforms for brand interaction, ahead of second-placed Twitter and Blogs; retail customers are more likely to reach for social media support than those in any other categories. Leary (2009) reported that 60 percent of Americans use social media, with 59 percent of those users interacting with companies on social media sites. Additionally, 93 percent of social media users feel companies should have a social media presence—with 56 percent of them saying they feel a stronger connection with companies that do.

2.1.3 Business Usage of Social Media

As the usage of social media increases exponentially, businesses and organizations are also using them as their marketing communication tools. According to one investigation of the 100 largest companies in the Fortune 500 list, 79% of them use social media tool such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and enterprise blogs to communicate with customers and other stakeholders (Axon, 2010). In addition, there was an annual report published by SocialMediaExaminer.com (2011), a top online business magazine dedicated to social media and being rated as one of the top 100 business blogs in the world at the end of 2011. For this report, authors conducted a survey of over 3300 marketers with the goal of understanding how marketers are using social media to

promote their businesses. They found that a significant 90% of these 3300 marketers indicated that social media is important for their business; one third of them wanted to know how to monitor and measure the return on investment (ROI) of social media and integrate their social media activities; the majority of these 3300 marketers (58%) were using social media for 6 hours or more each week, and more than 34% of them invested 11 or more hours weekly; 70% wanted to learn more about Facebook and 69% want to learned more about micro-blogging. Moreover, in this report 88% of these 3300 marketers indicated that the number-one advantage of social media marketing is generating more business exposure; and traffic (72%) and improved search rankings (62%) are also significant advantages. It also suggested that Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs are the top four social media tools used by marketers, in that order.

2.1.4 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is a component of organizations' integrated marketing communication strategy that organizations follow to connect with their targeted markets (Ernestad & Henriksson, 2010). Integrated marketing communications coordinate the elements of a promotional mix - advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion - to produce a customer-focused message (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media provides marketers an inexpensive way to create and implement integrated marketing campaigns (Ernestad & Henriksson, 2010). The channels of social media facilitate interactive communication, which is not possible through any other traditional media.

For businesses, marketers find social media to be an effective medium to communicate with their customers and employees. After individuals started using social media as a communication tool, companies have been paying close attention to how it has been used and are finding ways to capitalize on it as well (Fernando, 2007). Social media allows companies to create new connections with customers and interact with them, instead of sending one-way messages to people. One greatest potential benefit of social media for businesses is its ability to generate broad exposure for the brand and its products. This exposure may result in: networking opportunities with current and perspective customers that companies would not otherwise know how to access; increased intensive traffic to the enterprise website; a rise in the search rankings for the company; strengthened brand image, brand awareness, and customer loyalty (Ernestad & Henriksson, 2010).

The effectiveness of social media marketing on branding had driven much discussion. According to Kim and Ko (2010), social media can have a dramatic impact on a brand's reputation. In their research, one-third of all the survey participants posted opinions about products and brands on the brand's blog, and 36% thought positively about companies that have blogs. They conducted another research focusing on the growing usage of social media marketing among luxury fashion brands (Kim & Ko, 2011). The results suggest that the perceived social media marketing activities of luxury fashion brands (including entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth) have a positive impact on brand value equity, brand relationship equity, and

brand equity drivers. Social media can help luxury brands forecast future purchasing behavior of customers, and manage their marketing activities as well (Kim & Ko, 2011). A primary goal of social media marketing is to effectively keep communication lines open; and, the more companies communicate with customers directly and actively, the more brand trust and loyalty they can build (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Additionally, social media is also a good channel for marketing and competitor research. Weiss (2010) suggested that sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social networking tools can help in marketing and competitor research, since social media offers information about individuals for marketers to identify prospects, topic experts, and opinion leaders. It also provides user-supplied information on organizations. Moreover, some sites allow marketers to monitor trends in key areas of interest and can be used for traditional marketing research techniques (surveys, focus groups, etc).

Given the distinct characteristics, social media has the potential to substantially impact word-of-mouth marketing, which could positively influence brand awareness and brand image. Word-of-Mouth marketing is defined in Business Dictionary as oral or written recommendation provided by the satisfied customers to the prospective customers of a good product or service (Word-of-Month marketing, 2012). WOM has been argued to have a significant influence on consumers' purchase decision making process, as well as the perceptions of products and brands in post-purchase stage (Gruen et al., 2006). However, the effect of WOM has no longer been limited among face-to-face communication, because of the emergence of social media. The Internet appears as a

source and an outlet for e-WOM communication for customers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Similar to WOM, researchers suggested that e-WOM may have higher credibility, empathy and relevance to customers than the information created and communicated by marketer itself (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). According to an online survey conducted in August 2008 across a national sample of 500 males and females over the age of 13 (DEI Worldwide, 2008), 70% of consumers had visited social media sites to get information and 49% of these consumers have made a purchase decision based on the information they found; 60% of social media users were likely to use social media sites to pass along information to others online and 45% of those who searched for information via social media sites engaged in word-of-mouth. With a significant number of customers spreading brand-related information to others through social media, the value of posting is worth far more than what he or she initially spends (Kim & Ko, 2011). Berkley (2007) concluded that when a community of passionate advocates who share their beliefs towards products and brands is created, the trust, relevance, and renewed energy around the brand will be inspired by this conversation.

Kietzmann et al. (2011) provided a framework to define social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. In this framework, these seven blocks each represents one social media functionality and each one has an implication provided: 1) identity—the extent to which users reveal themselves, so companies have to balance the data privacy controls and the tools for users' self-promotion sharing; 2) conversation—the extent to which

users communicate with each other, thus companies should take the conversation velocity and the risks of starting and joining into concern; 3) sharing—the extent to which users exchange, distribute and receive content, so the content management system needs to be taken into account; 4) presence—the extent to which users know if others are available, thus companies should try to create a reality by augmenting intimacy and immediacy of the context; 5) relationships—the extent to which users related to each other, then companies should make an effort on managing the network of relationships with its stakeholders; 6) reputation—the extent to which users know the social standing of others and content, therefore monitoring the strength, passion, sentiment, and reach of users and its brand is very important for marketers; 7) groups—the extent to which users are ordered or form communities, thus a consideration of having membership will bring benefits to businesses. Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggested that by analyzing these seven building blocks, companies can monitor and understand social media activities in terms of their function and impact in order to develop a congruent social media marketing strategy.

2.2 Micro-blogging

2.2.1 Characteristics of Micro-blogging

Sui and Yang (2010) identified three characteristics of micro-blogging: great instantaneity, low enter threshold, and great originality. In terms of Twitter, every user is provided with a unique homepage displaying a list of micro-blog posts in a chronological order in a real-time manner. Multiplicity of publishing allows users to update information

via any application on users' mobile devices or personal computers. Those features enhance the instantaneity of micro-blogging enormously and make users enjoy a real-time online communication. Being different from blogging, micro-blogging requires very little complicated thoughts. A standard micro-blog post is approximately the length of a typical newspaper headline or subheading (Milstein, Chowdhury, Hochmuth, Lorica, & Magoulas, 2008) which makes it easy to produce and read as well. The low enter threshold makes the number of micro-blog users increase quickly in a short time. Moreover, micro-blog users express their original thoughts without any intended decoration, which is different from the deliberate blog posting. Micro-blogging makes it possible for companies and customers to participate in a real-time and interactive communication with original contents (Sui and Yang, 2010).

2.2.3 Classification of Micro-blogging Users

For businesses, the most important thing for the launch of micro-blog marketing is to understand what and how users think and behave. According to the report of micro-blog media features and user usage research (Wanrui, 2010) micro-blog users can be classified into four types in terms of their usage behaviors: self-expression users (46.40%), social users (16.20%), discussion users (16.40%), and silent users (21.00%). The main behavior of self-expression users is to post or express opinions and ideas as an individual. Social users explore the social functions of micro-blogging. They write posts and follow others' micro-blogs. They discuss popular topics, check comments, ask questions, and expect suggestions from other users. Most of them are early first users as

well as professional users. Discussion users do not follow other accounts very much but engage in the discussion of popular topics. They prefer to express their own opinions. Silent users do not like to post, but they like to read others' posts and check out popular topics. They are usually beginner level users in micro-blogging.

Being different from the classification of individual users of micro-blogging (Wanrui, 2010), Java, Song, Fini, and Tseng (2009) classified users on Twitter into three main categories: sources of information, friends and information seekers, which also covered other organizational and commercial users in micro-blogging. A Twitter user who is a source of information usually has a large number of followers due to the valuable nature of their updates. This group of users may post updates at regular intervals or frequently. Most relationships between users fall into the category of friends. The friendships in micro-blogging do not necessarily happen between friends in people's real life (such as family members or co-workers). An information seeker is a person who might post rarely but follows other users regularly. They also mentioned that a single user may have multiple intentions or may even serve different roles in different communities.

2.2.4 Business Usage of Micro-blogging

Because of the unique features and advantages of micro-blogging, many big companies regard it as a potential way of marketing and place high expectations on it. Based on the concept of micro-blogging, Sui and Yang (2010) indicated that micro-blog provides companies great potential to get customers' real brand-related opinions, improve relationship with customers, increase communication with customers and solve

customer's problems better. Two-thirds of the Fortune 100 companies have 4.2 Twitter accounts on average (Axon, 2010). In U.S. many large corporations and organizations such as Starbucks, Dell, Kodak, Comcast, all use micro-blogging for their marketing communication and customer relationship management. Dell and Starbucks' successful corporate micro-blogging on Twitter had been explored by many researchers (e.g. Jansen et al., 2009; Sui & Yang, 2010; Wang & Jin, 2010). For instance, Twitter has become the major platform for Dell to communicate with customer, as Twitter provides Dell the opportunity to make instant feedback. Also, Starbucks is active on the social media, and is keen on generating its online interaction with customers by creating accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Bulearca and Bulearca (2001) concluded that Twitter is a critical platform to embark on, especially if companies want to listen to consumers' opinions or even have significant influence on them.

2.2.5 Micro-blogging Marketing

Researchers started to explore the effect of micro-blogging as one potentially new form of e-WOM marketing. Micro-blogging enables two persons to become friends outside their immediate social network by "following" each other in this virtual community. Jansen et al. (2009) investigated micro-blogging as a form of e-WOM for sharing consumers' opinions concerning brands. In this research, more than 150,000 micro-blog posts containing branding comments, sentiments, and opinions to explore the overall e-WOM trends of brand micro-blogging had been analyzed, and results showed that 19% of these posts contain mention of a brand; nearly 20% of these branding micro-

blogs contained some expression of brand sentiments with more than 50% were positive and 33% were critical of the company or products. Authors concluded that customers' brand perceptions and purchasing decisions are influenced by online communications in micro-blogging, since consumers increasingly use these form of communication for seeking trusted sources of information, insights, and opinions (Jansen et al., 2009). When customers interact, socialize and entertain among this new type of social media, they describe their interests, share opinions and feelings towards the product they are using and the brand they like.

Some researchers also addressed the impact of micro-blogging on enterprise's relationship marketing. According to Matthews (2010), from the perspective of relationship marketing, the opinions of consumers are crucial to the long-term success of the company, and should be paid attention by executives. Relationship marketing is marketing based on interaction within networks of relationship (Gummesson, 2002). Corporate micro-blogging has a significant impact on customers' perceptions of commitment and trust toward the brand, which will impact brand relationship (Hsu, Liu, & Lee, 2010). Hsu et al. (2010) explored consumers' views on enterprises' conducting of relationship marketing through micro-blogging by conducting an online questionnaire survey of the users who have followed the micro-blog webpage of companies (e.g. Twitter) in Taiwan, and suggested that consumers' satisfaction on corporate micro-blogging has positive influences on commitment, trust, sense of community, and behavioral intentions. Due to the feature of real-time interaction, micro-blogging is

becoming a great communication tool for customer relationship marketing to find and win new customers, retain current customers, attract former customers back, and decrease the costs of customer service as well (Hsu et al., 2010).

Micro-blogging directly affects marketing communication, because it allows people to share these brand-related thoughts (e.g. sentiments, questions and experiences) almost anywhere to anyone. While the shortness of the micro-blog keeps people from writing long thoughts, it is precisely the micro part that makes micro-blogs unique from other social media tools, including blogs, web pages, and viral community for online reviews. Micro-blogging provides a much richer interaction experience for both enterprise and its followers, comparing with any other format of social communication. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) discussed that this kind of interaction provides big potential of using micro-blogging as a promising and effective marketing tool in three stage of the marketing process: 1) Pre-purchase (e.g. marketing research, customer involvement in brainstorming for new products); 2) Purchase (e.g. marketing communication, early access to new products or deals); and 3) Post-purchase (e.g. customer service) which reveals the great power of micro-blogging for the implementation of marketing strategy.

In addition, Jansen et al. (2009) explored how micro-blogging affect the brand image of company based on a general model of branding (Esch et al., 2006) in the online environment. Being aligned with the reasonable effects of micro-blogs, this model showed that micro-blogging has a direct influence on two components of brand knowledge (which are brand image and brand awareness); and current purchases can be

affected by brand image directly and by brand awareness indirectly. Moreover, brand knowledge can affect future purchases via a brand relationship, including brand satisfaction, brand trust, and brand attachment. Brand relationship may be the result of participation in brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Jansen et al. (2009) suggested that a company's monitoring and responses to posts and management of the corporate micro-blog account may affect brand relationship; and, micro-blogging can have positive and negative impacts on consumers' engagement in the brand communities. The possible effect of micro-blogging on the brand knowledge and brand relationship that play a crucial role in consumers' purchasing decisions underpins the importance of this research.

2.2.6 SINA Weibo – A Leading Micro-blogging service in China

SINA Weibo was established by SINA Corporation. It leads micro-blogging to be a tremendous social networking trend throughout China. Based on the annual report of SINA Corp., as of 2011, SINA Weibo has 31 million users in three years since it has been launched, generating over 10 million posts daily. The average number of followers of each account is over 100 and the average amount of time spending on SINA Weibo each user per day is about 60 minutes. Until March 30th in 2011, SINA Weibo had 56.5% of China's micro-blogging market based on active users and 86.6% based on browsing time over competitors. SINA Weibo is considered a leading social media site in China, since it is used by over 30% of Chinese Internet users (Rapoza, 2011). This is a similar market penetration that Twitter has established in the U.S. According to the annual report, there

are more than 5,000 companies using SINA Weibo including both state-owned enterprises as well as private and foreign-funded enterprises with 30% of users following those enterprise accounts. Gang Lu, a blogger and founding editor of China tech news site Tech Node, said that SINA Weibo is “now the most powerful social media channel in China” and “can be expected to attract more users” (Rapoza, 2011). In addition, according to AC Nielson report (2011), Chinese micro-blogging users shows four emotional intentions including: 1) expressing own opinions at any moment; 2) obtaining the latest information; 3) following acquaintances and friends’ updates; and 4) discussing popular topics with others.

Sina Weibo implements many features from Twitter. Users may post with a 140-character limit, mention or talk to other people using the format of “@Account Name”, putting a short term between two hash tags # to indicate the topic of posts, follow other people to make his/her posts appear in users' own timeline, repost with “//@Account Name” similar to Twitter's re-tweet function “RT @Account Name”, and put a post into the favorite list. URLs shared in a post are automatically shortened using the domain name t.cn like Twitter's t.co. Official and third-party applications enable users to access Sina Weibo from other websites or platforms. Additionally, users are allowed to insert graphical emoticons or attach their own images, music, video files in their posts. Comments to a post can be shown as a list right below the post. Users can also repost other users’ posts on their own pages with or without leaving a comment. Moreover,

there is a function that users could identify all the accounts they followed into different self-named categories, which make the experience of micro-blogging personal.

In term of the way to get connected with other users by micro-blogging, one user could follow different accounts; in other words, a user can be followed by many other users. The number of accounts you are following, the number of followers you have, and the number of posts you have published are shown in users' account profile; and all this information is publicly accessible for all users of SINA Weibo, no matter if they are followers of this account or not. In general, in SINA Weibo there are different categories of micro-blog accounts, including individual users' account, corporations or organizations' account, and the information resource account for a particular topic (e.g. jokes, daily news, and fashion information). In this study, the research focused the corporate micro-blogging and its followers' interaction.

The global market research company AC Nielson published a detailed report of the comparison of micro-blogging between America and China at the end of 2011. In this AC Nielson Report (2011), it says that the users of SINA Weibo are much more active than the users of Twitter, and they have stronger willingness to participate in social interaction with others in this virtual community. It also claims that 19% of SINA Weibo are using their real names; 26% of users publish very personal information frequently; 41% of users allow the website to obtain their geographic location; 86% of users are willing to share and communicate with others; and 47% of users is following their colleagues in SINA Weibo. However, being different from SINA Weibo, all these items

decrease to 41%, 4%, 17%, 64% and 19% respectively for Twitter users. Moreover, there is one strongpoint of SINA Weibo compared with Twitter. The volume of messages in one single post of SINA Weibo is bigger than that in a single tweet, because in general Chinese characters express more information than English characters. For example, a Kiehl's corporate post in SINA Weibo published in Feb. 17th, 2012 introduced the function of a product in 137 Chinese characters. However, by translating the content of this micro-blog post into English, it becomes a post that contains about 380 characters and cannot be posted in one single micro-blog post in Twitter.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Case Study of Kiehl's

Case study can help researchers gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. This study was most suited for a case study design because it sought to better understand how Chinese micro-blogging SINA Weibo has been employed as a marketing communication tool for companies, especially for western brands. Thus, first I conducted a close observation of ten well-known western brands in the fashion industry using SINA Weibo for marketing. By calculating the average number of total posts that these ten corporate accounts have published is 2036.3, and the average number of total followers they have is 151301.6 (see Table 2). And, most of these accounts have been used for at least one year. Based on this observation, these companies in fashion industry has recognized the importance and effectiveness of micro-blogging on branding and customer relationship, and already made much effort on this strategy, especially the companies of the beauty products (e.g., Clinique, Sephora) and sportswear (e.g., Nike, Adidas). This observation leads me to choose Kiehl's – an American beauty and cosmetics brand as the focus of this case study.

Table 2

The Usage of SINA Weibo in Fashion Industry

Category	Brand Name	Since	Posts	Followers
Luxury Product	Louis Vitton	2010.10.15	203	174360
	Gucci	2011.1.26	480	110158

Fast Fashion	H&M	2011.4.4	1508	233211
Apparel	Zara	2010.5.27	216	205375
Beauty Product	Lancome	?	2602	98215
	Estee Lauder	2010.8.18	1549	102932
	Clinique	2010.2.3	3830	77093
	Sephora	2010.12.16	2238	74115
Sportswear	Nike	2010.4.13	4418	98216
	Adidas Original	2010.6.18	3319	339341

Note. All the data has been collected on March 7th, 2012. The starting date of Lancome SINA Weibo account is hidden.

Kiehl's is a popular American beauty and cosmetics brand that specializes in making premium skin, hair, and body care products. Founded as a single pharmacy in New York City's East Village in 1851, Kiehl's was purchased by the L'Oréal Group in 2000 and Kiehl's has more than 30 retail stores worldwide, supplemented by sales in high-end department stores. In contrast to its market competitors, Kiehl's is distinguished for its unorthodox marketing approach, exceptionally large male clientele base and its products' simple and straightforward packaging.

Kiehl's entered into the Chinese beauty market in 2011 by launching its official online shopping website, opening 18 retail stores in several department stores and shopping malls, and in several duty-free shops in Chinese airports. The Kiehl's marketing team spent much effort on its integrated marketing communication, particularly a

marketing strategy using social media. The Kiehl's SINA Weibo account name is "Mr. Bones of Kiehl's". This represents the brand icon "Mr. Bones" skeleton that aims to convey the science and medicinal background behind the brand's formulations. There are active interactions between Kiehl's SINA Weibo account and its followers. As of March 1st, 2012, there 65,328 followers and 2,416 posts published in the Keihl's SINA Weibo account, since its inception on October 18th, 2010. In addition, the number of followers of this account on Feb. 1st, 2012 was 56370. Thus, within these 30 days the total number of followers had increased by 298.6 per day. SINA Weibo helps Keihl's reach a large number of current or potential customers that they may not be able to reach by any other marketing tools or methods. Due to the Keihl's success in attracting followers, I believe that as a growing brand in the Chinese market, Kiehl's micro-blogging can provide valuable insights for other businesses that are aiming to explore new markets in China and to build brand awareness.

3.2 Content Analysis

In this study, the method used to explore the patterns of corporate micro-blogging communication was content analysis. Content analysis is an established social science methodology concerned broadly with "the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of communication" (Baran, 2002, p. 410). As a medium of communication, websites lend themselves prima facie to content analysis (Weare & Lin, 2000). Indeed, content analysis was one of the first methodologies used in web analysis (e.g., Bates & Lu, 1997). Content analysis is a systematic technique for coding symbolic

content (text, images, etc.) in communication, especially structural features (e.g., message length, distribution of certain text or image components) and semantic themes (Bauer, 2000).

While the primary purpose of content analysis is to identify and describe patterns in manifest content—what the audience perceives through the senses, rather than what they feel or believe as a result of that content, or what the producer of the content intended—the technique can also be used for making inferences about intentions and effects (Krippendorff, 1980). The most prototypical uses of content analysis have been the analysis of written mass media content by scholars of advertising, communication, and journalism. However, recent content analysis techniques have also been increasingly used to analyze content on the Internet. Since the objective of this research project was the content of micro-blogging communication on the Internet, it was appropriate to employ the content analysis method for this study.

3.3 Content Coding Scheme

The action-object pair approach (Zhang & Jansen, 2008) was used in this study to qualitatively code the micro-blogging content. An action is a specific expression to the object, and an object is self-contained information. Together, these two components form an action-object pair and represent one interaction between the user and the system. Researchers previously used this method to analyze the brand micro-blogging of Starbuck's enterprise Twitter account (Jansen et al., 2009). They identified 386 unique action-object pairs and 2,490 total action-object pairs, after analyzing 322 Starbuck

enterprise tweets and 1,472 followers' comments. In conclusion, they suggested that one can view Starbucks' Twitter account as a place for a combination of customer testimony, complaining, feedback, and Q&A. Thus, I believe that this action-object pair approach for the coding scheme construction is appropriate and efficient for this research.

In this study, the object is material that was relevant to Kiehl's within five categories (i.e. product, retailing, service, marketing, brand). The action is the expression concerning the object within two categories (i.e. Kiehl's and follower). For example, an action can be a negative expression, asking a question, or providing a suggestion. Thus, the action and object together make an action-object pair, and a thread of action-object pairs can tell a story regarding aspects of the brand and its customers. For instance, the negative expression (under the category of follower) – function (under the category of product) pair indicates the customer's dissatisfaction toward the functionality of a product from Kiehl's. One post can be coded with multiple action-object pairs. I used an inductive coding approach to develop the coding schema for the micro-blogging content analysis. Preliminary coding scheme was developed based on a pilot study using the content analysis of Kiehl's micro-blogging within three days. As the analysis progressed, some actions and objects were eliminated or combined, and some were added to this coding scheme. The final lists of codes for actions and objects are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 with detailed explanations and examples.

Table 3

Actions in the Coding Scheme

Action	Instructions and examples
<i>Kiehl's</i>	
Announce	Declaring the upcoming objects
Introduce	Bringing to the knowledge of objects
Suggest	Providing ideas to followers toward objects
Answer	Handling a question
Share	Letting others know of objects
Apologize	Admitting to an error with an expression of regret
Bring a question	Involving followers in a micro-blogging dialogue
Appreciate	Expressing appreciation
<i>Follower</i>	
Negative expression	Critiquing, complaining
Positive expression	Complimenting, praising
Share	Letting others know of objects
Expect	Looking forward to objects
Ask question	Expressing confusion or doubt toward objects; Inquiring or requesting information toward objects
Engage	Providing occupation for objects
Suggest to company	Providing ideas to Kiehl's toward objects

Suggest to followers	Providing ideas to other followers toward objects
Chitchat	Casual conversation, unrelated to Kiehl's
@friends	Referring and letting other users know
Ads	Providing advertising for store or personal business

Table 4

Objects in the Coding Scheme

Object	Explanations and examples
<i>Product</i>	
	A particular product mentioned in the corporate post
A product	e.g., the over-night serum
	The right way to use a product
Usage	e.g., using at daytime or nighttime, two drops or three, how to use it with other products
	The effectiveness of a product
Function	e.g., moisturizing, anti-aging or even skin tone
Experience of using	Customers' feeling about using products
Price	The price of a product
	Advice about certain products
Recommendation	e.g., what product is suitable for a particular

	skin type
Packaging	The packaging of a product
Purchasing	The product purchased or to be purchased by customers
Authenticity	The authenticity of a product
One ingredient	A particular ingredient mentioned in a post e.g., lavender essential oil in the over-night serum
All kiehls products	Not a particular product, but the overall products of Kiehl's
<i>Retailing</i>	
Real store location	The location of a real store e.g., in which city or in which area
Online store	The official online shopping website
Product availability	If it is out of stock in real store or online
<i>Service</i>	
Sales assistant	Customer service quality of sales assistant
Micro-blog interaction	The communication through micro-blogging e.g., bring out a question about products for encouraging followers' interaction

<i>Marketing</i>	
	Online or in store promotion
Promotion information	e.g., purchase with gift
Product sample	Product sample distribution or receiving
	Commercial event happening in a real store
In-store event	e.g., a celebrity will attend to a event
	An online activity initiated by the company
	e.g., having a chance to win the prize by
	answering product-related question or reposting
Corporate-initiated online activity	the corporate post; the results of who is the winner
Celebrity recommendation	Celebrity's recommendation of products
<i>Brand</i>	
	Information or story for brand culture
Brand culture	communication
	Providing a new special packaging for the product, which is designed by artists, and
	donating a certain amount of money from each
Charity campaign	product they sold
	Best award issued by renowned beauty or
Award won	fashion magazine

	e.g., the best body lotion; the best moisturizer
	The accomplishment on sales
Sales success	e.g., how popular this product is; how many it's been sold
Music	Music shared in corporate account
Other brand-related information	e.g., Information about how to obtain a wonder sleeping

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the degree in which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure (Yin, 2003). In this research, I adapted the action-object pair coding approach and the items to answer my three research questions from a published research paper, focusing on the corporate communication patterns of Twitter (Jansen et al., 2009), which was similar to my research topic. In addition, I consulted experts in the subject area when making choices and decisions during the research process. For the Chinese to English translation, I consulted Jin Shan Dictionary. Reliability is the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials (Yin, 2003). To enhance reliability of this study, I took a screenshot of each post as well as all of the comments from the Web, and saved them into an electronic archive, which I retrieved and rechecked repeatedly. In addition, detailed explanations of how the data were

collected and analyzed were provided. Such procedures facilitate an in-depth exploration and understanding of the phenomenon of corporate micro-blogging that helps to ensure validity and reliability for my research.

3.5 Data Collection and Sample

To address the first research question (What are the patterns of corporate micro-blogging?), I analyzed the corporate micro-blogging posts to determine the content of the posts and characteristics of such posting. I explored three aspects of the communication patterns: the number of posting (i.e., How many posts did Kiehl's SINA Weibo account publish every day?), the time of posting (i.e., When did Kiehl's post?), and the content of posts (i.e., What was post about?). There are three different types of posts: the content is a posting originally published by the corporate account (P1); the content is a reposting of a previous corporate post, which can be considered as a reminder post to its followers (P2); the content is a reposting of an individual user's post (P3).

The following is an example that explains what type of data I collected from one corporate post and how I coded the content by employing the coding scheme. Generally, the verbal content of one post is shown on top, and if there is an image or video it will be shown below the verbal content in a limited size. At the bottom left of the post, there contains information about when and from which application this post has been published, and on the right side there are three options for readers' interaction: 1) repost, 2) bookmark, and 3) comment. The number in parentheses indicates how many times this post has been reposted or commented. Users can either repost this post into their own

micro-blog account to share with their own micro-blog followers, or provide a comment under this post, or do both.

For instance, the following corporate post shown in Image 1 was published at 10:48 am, on Dec. 15th, 2011. Here is the translation of this post: “#the relay race of new retail stores at the end of this year# On Dec. 21 one new Kiehl’s retail store is coming at Wuhan Square, address: 688 Jiefang Road, 1F Wuhan Square, Wuhan. Meanwhile, on Dec. 23 another Kiehl’s retail store will debut at Shanghai PudongZhengda Square, address: 168 West Lujiazui Road, 1F Zhengda Square, Pudong new district. Mr. Bone extremely welcomes all the fans to stop by.” Usually, the topic of each post is shown between two hash tags # at the beginning of the corporate post, such as #the relay race of new retail stores at the end of this year# in this example. “Announce” which is under the company category in the coding scheme is the most appropriate action for this content, because the company is declaring an upcoming object in this post. Furthermore, it is easy to recognize that this upcoming object is the opening of two new Kiehl’s retail stores that will debut in two different cities; and, in this post the company provides the detailed location information about these two upcoming real stores. Thus, the object “Real store location” under the retail category in the coding scheme is the most suitable one.

#年末新柜接力跑#12月21日Kiehl's将有一家新的专柜诞生啦，这就武汉广场，具体地点：武汉市解放大道688号武汉广场1F。同时Kiehl's在12月23日又将登陆上海浦东正大广场，具体地点：浦东新区陆家嘴西路168号正大广场1F。骨头先生无比热烈滴欢迎所有K家粉丝们前来现场围观~~~



2011-12-15 10:48 来自 新浪微博企业版

转发 (53) | 收藏 | 评论 (39)

Image 1. An example of the corporate post published at 10:48 am, on Dec. 15th, 2011.

For the second research question (What are the patterns of micro-blogging interaction between the company and its followers?), I closely examined the patterns of Kiehl's communication with their customers through the SINA Weibo. I explored three aspects of the communication patterns: the number of comments and reposts (i.e., How many comments and reposts received by each Kiehl's SINA Weibo post?), the content of comments (i.e., What did followers comment about?), and the location of active followers (i.e., which province in China are they from?). All of the comments are shown in a reverse timeline, which will appear under each post after clicking the "Comment" button. The listed comments can be classified into four categories, depending on provider and receiver of each comment: comments by followers to express their feeling and opinion regarding the corporate post and the brand (C1); interacting comments among followers (C2-1); responding comments by Kiehl's to provide feedback or answer followers' questions in their comments (C2-2); responding comments by Kiehl's followers (C3).

C2-1 and C2-2 occur after C1; and, C3 occurs after C2-2. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between corporate posts and four different types of comments.

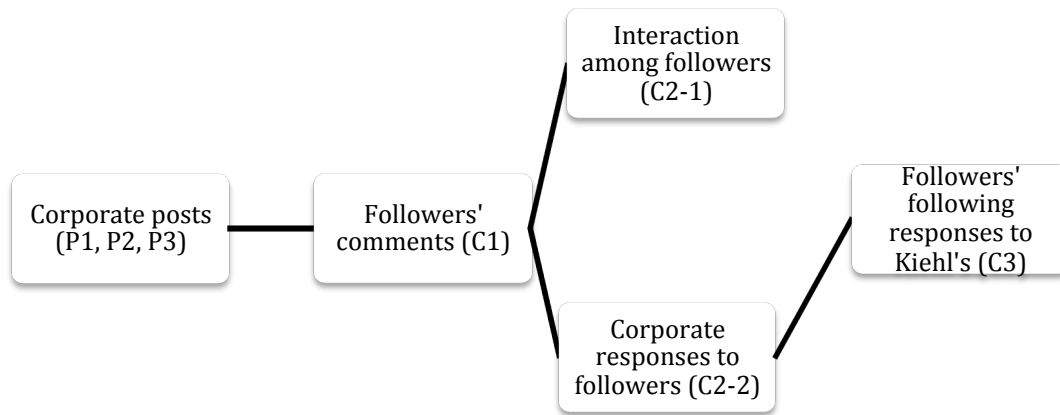


Figure 1. The Relationship between the Corporate Posts and the Followers' Comments.

The following is an example that explains what type of data I collected from the followers' comments and how I coded the content of these comments. Concerning the previous example of Kiehl's corporate post, this aforementioned post has been reposted 53 times and commented 39 times. I coded all comments in the first page to this post shown in Image 3.2: C1 occurred 6 times, C2-2 occurred 3 times, and C3 occurred once. The translation of the first 10 followers' comments is shown in Table 5. Note that C2-1 does not occur in this list of comments. In interacting comments C2-1, and responding comments C2-2 and C3, there must be a term "Reply @Account Name" before the comment, and "Account Name" represents the receiver of the reply, either an individual user or Kiehl's. For example, in the comment No. 10 the receiver is an individual user who is also the provider of comment No. 8. In this comment, the follower asked a question about an in-store event and the corporate account responded to this follower by

answering the question. By using the same content analysis approach, the action-object pairs had been identified for each comment.



Image 2. The first page of comments of a corporate post.

Table 5

Translation of the Followers' Comments

No. of	Time	Category	Content	Action-object Pair
Comment				
1	10:48	C1	When will you have retail store in Xiamen?	Ask question, Real store location
2	10:49	C2-2 to 1	We are trying and it will come true.	Answer question, Real store location
3	10:49	C1	Why don't open retail store in Guangzhou?	Ask question, Real store location
4	10:49	C1	Haha, open at noon, is there any interesting event?	Ask question, In-store event
5	10:50	C2-2 to 3	We are trying and it will come true.	Answer question, Real store location
6	10:50	C1	Definitely repost and support Kiehl's	Positive expression
7	10:51	C1	Is there any promotion at Wuhan's retail store?	Ask question, Promotion information
8	10:51	C1	Definitely will go, is there any event?	Ask question, In-store event

9	10:51	C3 to 2	Looking forward, and please ASAP, then shopping for Kiehl's won't be that troublesome.	Expect, Real store location
10	10:52	C2-2 to 8	There will be Purchase with Gift in-store event, please come.	Answer question, In-store event

To answer the first and second question, I collected data from November, 2011 to February, 2012, on the first, second, third, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth day. The purpose of this sampling method was to ensure a fair representation of what is happening in those months. A total of 135 corporate posts with 2443 comments and 3049 reposts were published during the 24 days. On average were 18.1 comments and 22.6 reposts for each corporate post. The number of posts, comments, and reposts for each month are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

<i>The Number of Posts/Comments/Reposts</i>					
	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Total
Posts by corporate account (P1, P2, P3)	47	29	26	31	135
Comments by followers (C1, C2-1, C2-2, C3)	934	360	751	398	2443
Reposts by followers	838	393	1090	728	3049

For the third research question (What are the patterns of customers' brand-related micro-blogging?), only the posts that provided the "@Mr. Bone Kiehl's" were selected and coded because this directly concerns the Kiehl's brand and Kiehl's would be automatically notified. The number of comments and reposts by other users were also calculated, since these are the indicators of the influence of brand-related micro-blogging and the effectiveness of micro-blogging as e-WOM. In addition, the number of comments and reposts received by each post, how many followers the users have, how many micro-blog accounts they are following, and how many posts they have already published were also collected and analyzed. This provides valuable information about the usage behaviors of those communicators.

To answer the third question, I collected 400 brand-related posts published by individual users of the SINA Weibo account from Feb. 22nd to 28th and from Mar. 22nd to 28th, 2012. Those brand-related posts were searched by using the symbol @ followed with the account name of Kiehl's as the keyword in the SINA Weibo imbedded search engine. During these two weeks, 400 customer posts were related to the brand. Within these posts, 191 posts were provided by individual users, who discussed their product purchasing experience and opinions regarding Kiehl's. The remaining 209 posts were reposts for participating in a corporate-initiated online activity. These original individual users' posts were fully analyzed by using the same content analysis method, which could provide a good understanding of the effect and influence of customers' e-WOM in micro-blogging.

4 Results

4.1 Research Question #1: What are the patterns (number, time and content of posts) of corporate micro-blogging?

In total, 135 corporate posts have been coded by employing the coding scheme with the content analysis approach. Figure 2 shows the percentage of three different types of corporate posts, published during a twenty-four day period in which I collected data. Eighty-three (61.48%) corporate posts were the original posts (P1) published by Kiehl's; eighteen (13.33%) were the posts for reposting a previous corporate post (P2); and thirty-two (25.19%) were the posts for reposting an individual users' post (P3).

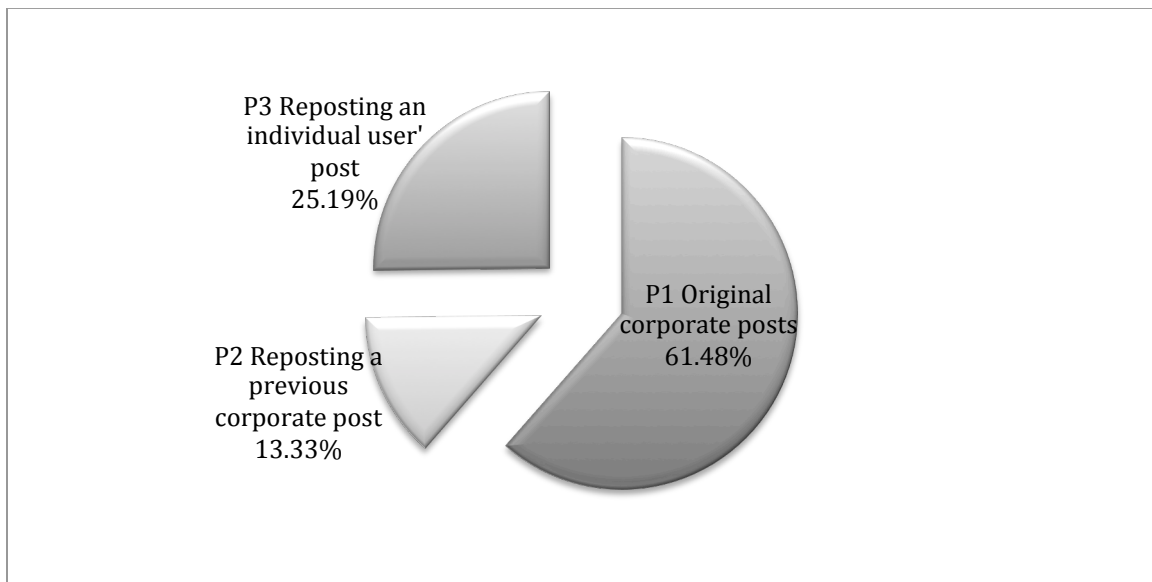


Figure 2. Categories of the Corporate Micro-blog Posts.

By checking the topic of corporate posts, which is shown between two hash tags# at the beginning of each post, I found that there are 27 unique post topics in the 83 original corporate posts (P1). These 27 unique topics were classified into four categories,

product (46.99%), marketing (6.02%), retailing (4.82%) and brand (42.17%) (see Figure 3). By calculating the average number of comments and reposts for each category, I found that the posts in the marketing category received 98 comments and 64.4 reposts on average, with 25.2 comments and 29.3 reposts in the product category, 22.8 comments and 29.3 reposts in retailing category, 8.7 comments and 22 reposts in the brand category (see Figure 4.3).

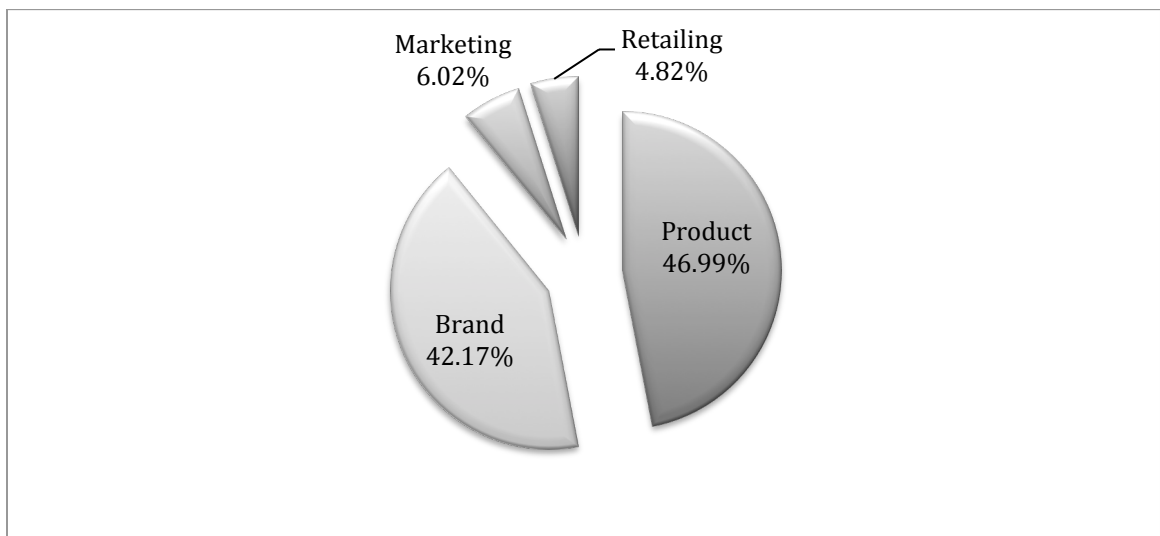


Figure 3. Categories of the Original Corporate Posts (P1).

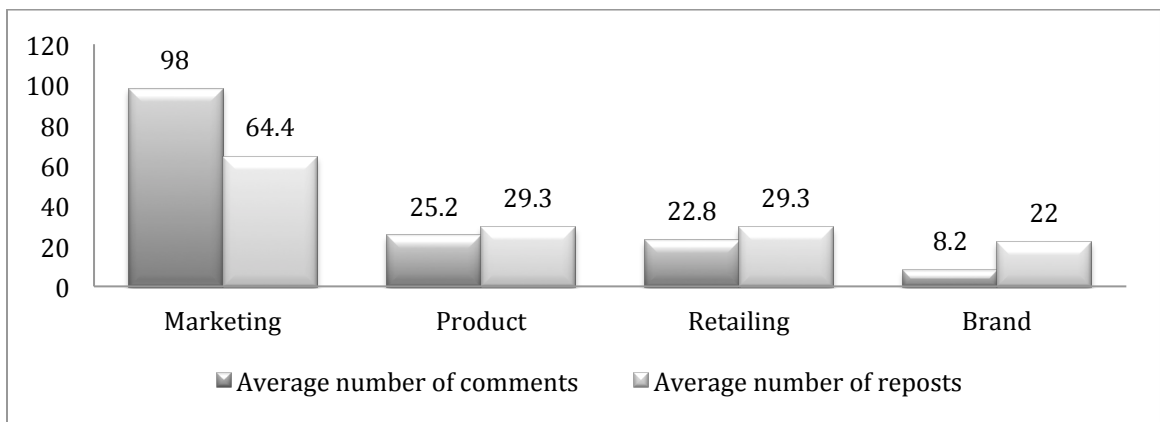


Figure 4. Average Number of Comments and Reposts of P1.

By using the action-object approach, 23 unique action-object pairs were identified in a total of 117 action-object pairs (see Table 7). The most frequent action-object pair was the “introduce function” (19.66%), followed by the “introduce a product”(10.26%), the “share brand culture” (10.26%), and the “introduce usage” (9.40%). In these four pairs, only the pair “share brand culture” was directly related to brand; the other three were all associated with product, which altogether account for 45.32% of all pairs. And, the remaining pairs account for only 38.42% (see Figure 5). In addition, nearly half of the actions in the original corporate posts were “introduce” (47.01 %), followed by “share” (24.79%), “announce” (15.38%). These three categories of actions altogether account for 87.18% of all actions (in Figure 6).

Table 7

Action-object Pairs in the Original Corporate Posts (P1)

Action	Object	Count	Percentage
	Function	23	19.66%
	A product	12	10.26%
	Usage	11	9.40%
	Particular ingredient	7	5.98%
Introduce	Charity campaign	2	1.71%
	Brand culture	12	10.26%
	Music	8	6.84%
Share	Other brand-related information	6	5.13%

	Celebrity recommendation	2	1.71%
	Sales success	1	0.85%
	Charity campaign	4	3.42%
	In-store event	4	3.42%
	Corporate-initiated online activity	3	2.56%
	Real store location	3	2.56%
	Award won	2	1.71%
Announce	Recommendation	2	1.71%
	Usage	6	5.13%
	A product	4	3.42%
Suggest	Online store	1	0.85%
	Particular ingredient	2	1.71%
Bring a question	Function	1	0.85%
Appreciate	None	1	0.85%
Total		117	100%

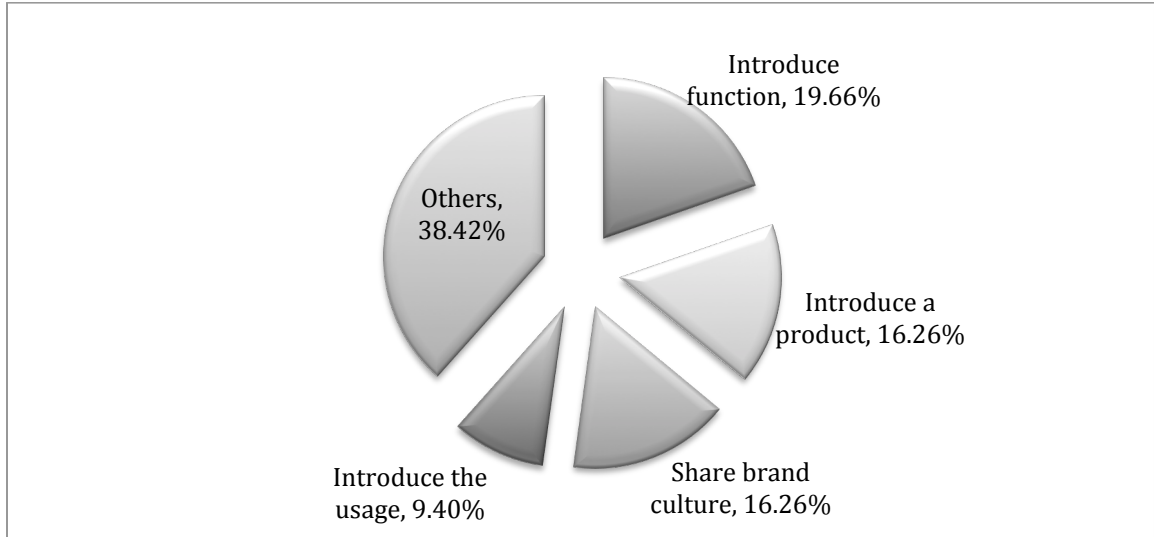


Figure 5. The Most Frequent Action-Object Pairs in P1.

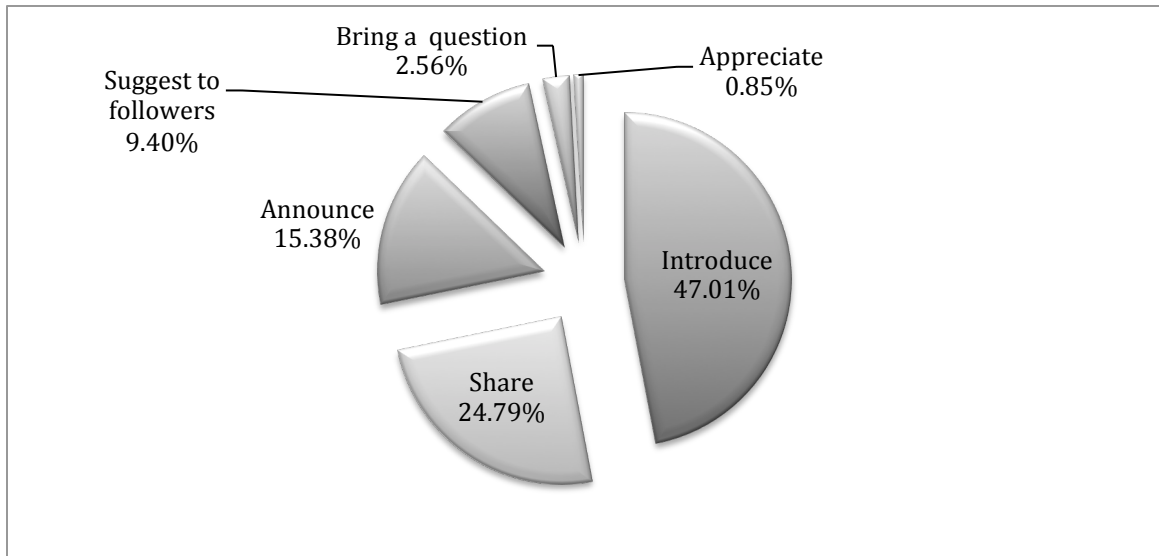


Figure 6. Actions in the Original Corporate Posts (P1).

Except for the 83 original corporate posts, 18 of the 135 corporate posts (13.33%) were the reposting of previous corporate posts (P2). P2 is comprised of some new content accompanied with one previous post below. In the 18 reposts, fifteen were the reposting

of an announcement of a corporate-initiated online activity to remind followers to participate or to notify the winner to contact the company.

Moreover, there were 34 corporate posts (25.19%), which were the reposting of an individual user's post (P3). The top three of P3 were all related to product, including "suggest a product" (17.07%), "share a product" (14.63%), and "introduce function" (12.20%), followed by "announce corporate-initiated online activity" (9.76%) and "appreciate" (9.76%) (see Figure 7).

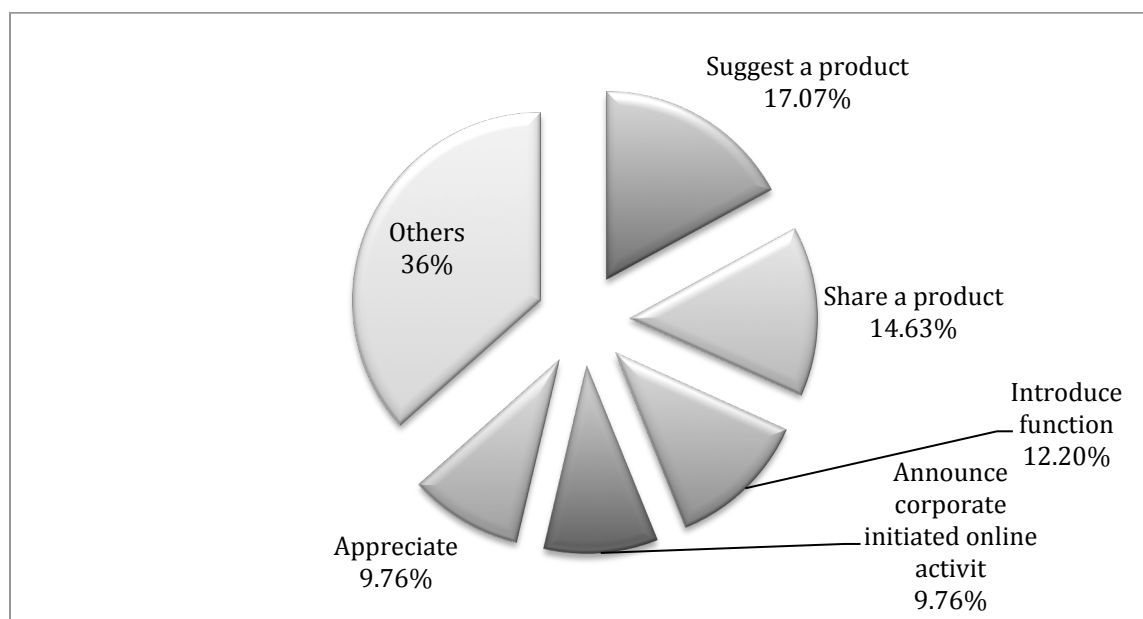


Figure 7. The Most Frequent Action-Object Pairs in P3.

Pertaining to the posting time, Figure 8 shows that the most frequent posting time is during 1 pm to 2 pm; half of all corporate posts were published from 8 am to 11 am, 1 pm to 2 pm, and 3 pm to 5 pm.

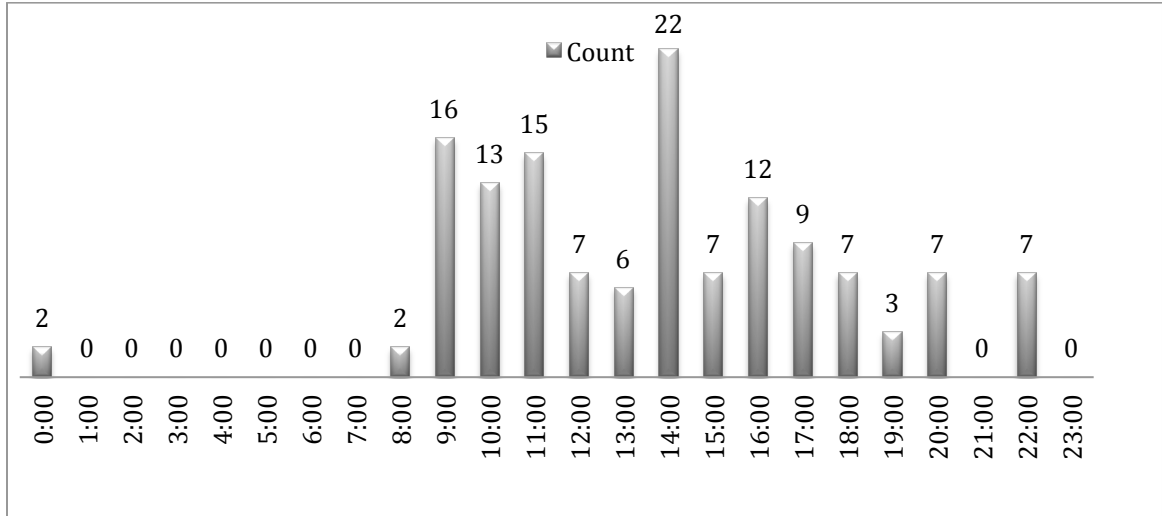


Figure 8. The Posting Time of the Corporate Posts.

4.2 Research Question #2: What are the patterns (number and content of comments, location of active followers) of micro-blogging interaction between the company and its followers?

Out of a total of 2443 comments that Kiehl’s received for the corporate posts, there were 1940 comments from followers to Kiehl’s (C1), 258 comments among followers (C2-1), 167 comments to followers provided by Kiehl’s (C2-2), and 78 comments to Kiehl’s provided by followers after they received Kiehl’s responses (C3) (see Figure 9).

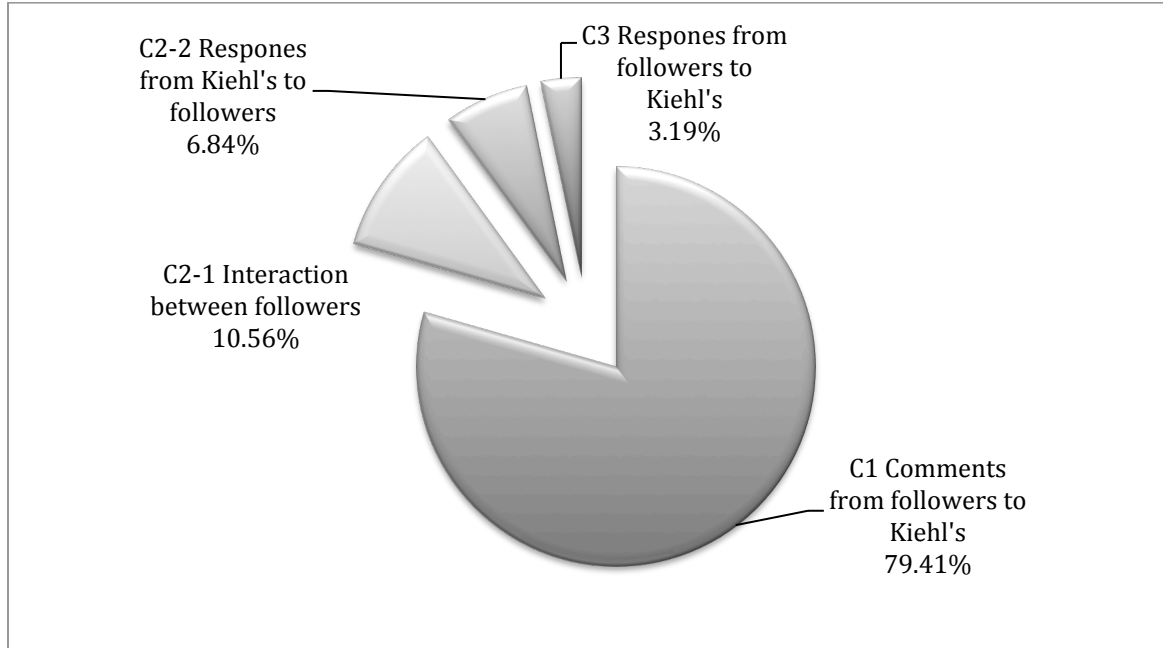


Figure 9. Categories of the Followers' Comments.

Concerning the content of the 1940 followers' comments (C1), there were 85 unique action-object pairs in the 2139 total action-object pairs identified from C1; 21 (85.04%) of the 85 unique action-object pairs occurred over 20 times (see Table 8) and the other 64 unique action-object pairs (14.96%) occurred less than 20 times. The most frequent action-object pair was "engage corporate-initiated online activity" (24.73%) which is related to marketing, followed by "ask question about usage" (7.43%), "share experience of using" (6.73%), "positive expression about a product" (5.94%), which were all related to product; and, these four most frequent pairs account for 44.83% of all pairs (see Figure 10).

Table 8

Action-object Pairs (Occurrence >20) in the Followers' Comments to Kiehl's (C1)

Action	Object	Count	Percentage
Engage	Corporate-initiated online activity	529	24.73%
	Micro-blog interaction	61	2.85%
Usage	Usage	159	7.43%
	Recommendation	46	2.15%
	A product	39	1.82%
	Function	34	1.58%
	Product availability	33	1.54%
	Real store location	32	1.50%
	Promotion information	24	1.12%
	Price	22	1.03%
Ask question	Experience of using	144	6.73%
	Purchase	68	3.18%
Share	A product	127	5.94%
	None	98	4.58%
	Experience of using	83	3.88%
	Function	60	2.81%
Positive expression	Corporate-initiated online activity	27	1.26%
Chitchat	None	119	5.56%

Expect	Purchase	69	3.23%
Ads	None	24	1.12%
@ friends	None	21	0.98%
Total	21	1819	85.04%

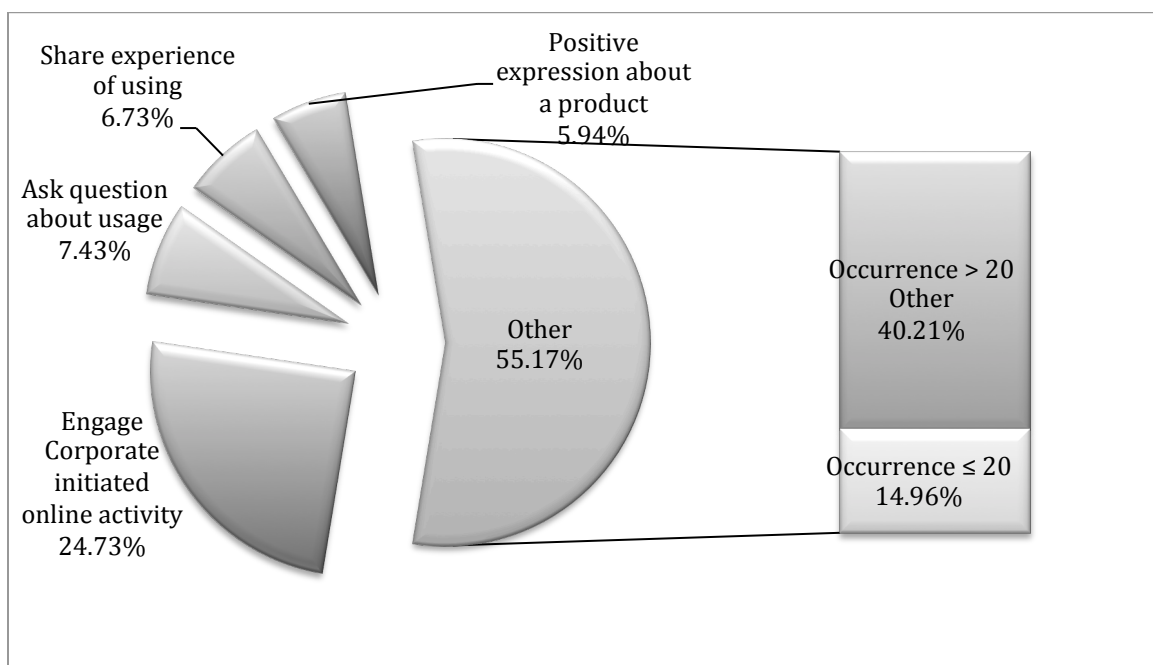


Figure 10. The Most Frequent Action-Object Pairs in C1.

With regard to object, there were 1875 total objects identified; 53.39% of all objects were related to product; 35.09% were related to marketing; 6.61% were related to retailing; 4.05% were related to service; and, 0.86% were related to brand (see Figure 11). 80.40% of the pairs under the category of marketing are “engage” in a “corporate-initiated online activity”. 70.29% of the pairs under the category of product are “asking question” about the product “usage”, “recommendation”, “function”, “a product”, etc.

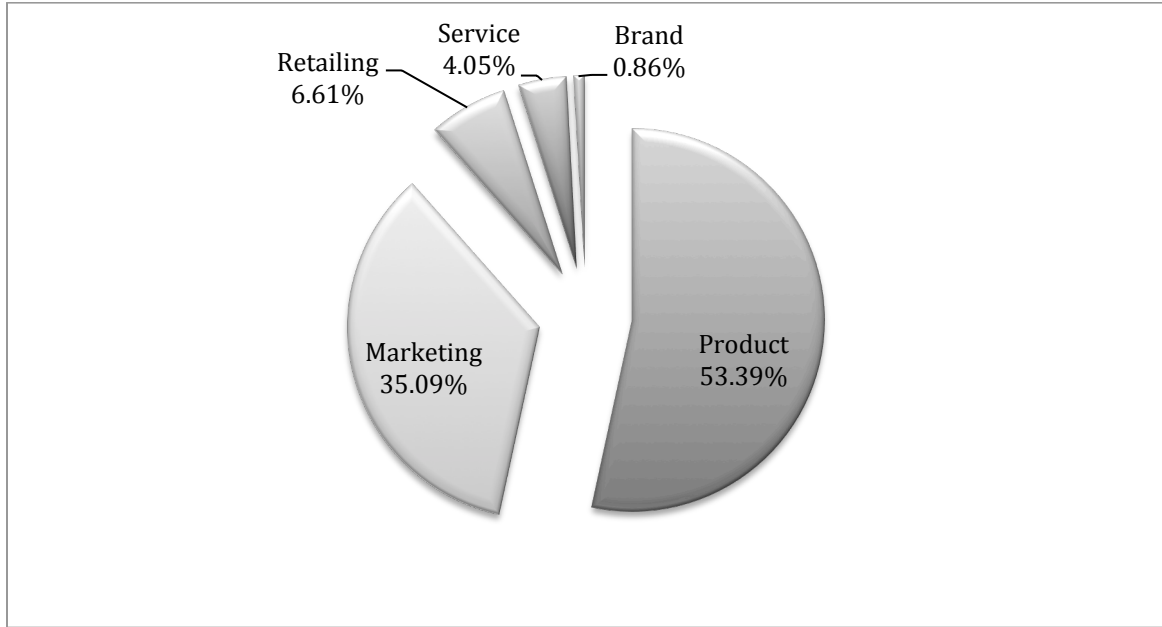


Figure 11. Categories of the Objects in Followers' Comments to Kiehl's (C1).

In terms of action, 2139 total actions were identified which were more than the total objects, because some actions did not necessarily pair with an object, such as “Ads”, “Chitchat” and “@friends”. The most frequent action was “engage” (27.58%), followed by “ask question” (22.25%), “positive expression” (21.27%), and “share” (10.52%) (see Table 9). These four most frequent actions altogether account for 81.62% of all actions.

Table 9

Actions in the Followers' Comments to Kiehl's (C1)

Action	Count	Percentage
Engage	590	27.58%
Ask question	476	22.25%
Positive expression	455	21.27%

Share	225	10.52%
Chitchat	119	5.56%
Expect	112	5.24%
Negative expression	104	4.86%
Ads	24	1.12%
@ friends	21	0.98%
Suggest	13	0.62%
Total	2139	100%

Along with the action “negative expression” (4.86%), the actions showing a brand sentiment, either a positive or negative sentiment, altogether account for 26.13% of all actions. Within 4.86% of followers’ comments, which were related to “negative expression” (i.e., 104 out of 2142), 18 were associated with the “corporate-initiated online activity”. Customers complained that they won a corporate-initiated online activity, but haven’t got the prize. In addition, 17 were about “product availability” complaining that products were out of stock when customers want to purchase them in store. Some of the other common negative expressions were related to “experience of using” a product, “function” of a product, “packaging” of a lipstick product, the service attitude of “sales assistant” in a retail store.

In addition, there were four “negative expression toward micro-blog interaction” in which followers complained that they never received responses to their questions from Kiehl’s. It leads me to question about the percentage of questions asked by followers in

C1 and C3 had been responded by Kiehl's in C2-2. Figure 12 shows that only 27.88% of questions had been responded with an answer or a suggestion to followers by Kiehl's.

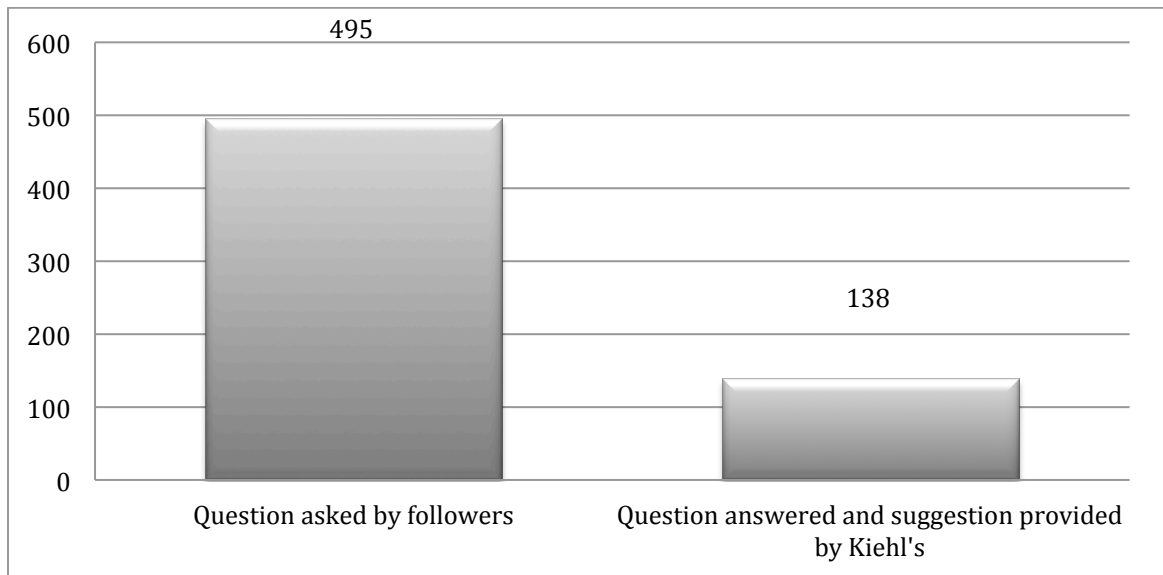


Figure 12. Question asked by followers and answered by Kiehl's.

Followers of corporate accounts interacted with each other by responding to each other's comments. There were 258 responses to followers provided by other followers (C2-1) and 269 total action-object pairs identified. In Figure 13, there were 141(52.42%) actions of interacting comments (C2-1) among followers associated with Kiehl's to share or ask question about the usage. And, the first and second most frequent actions were "share" (28.25%) and "ask question" (13.01%), which altogether account for 41.26% of all actions. Followers mainly shared about "usage", "product using experience", and asked about "usage". In addition, besides the other 11.15% related to Kiehl's, 47.58% were unrelated to Kiehl's, and are just casual conversations between followers (i.e., discussions about the latest movie or music).

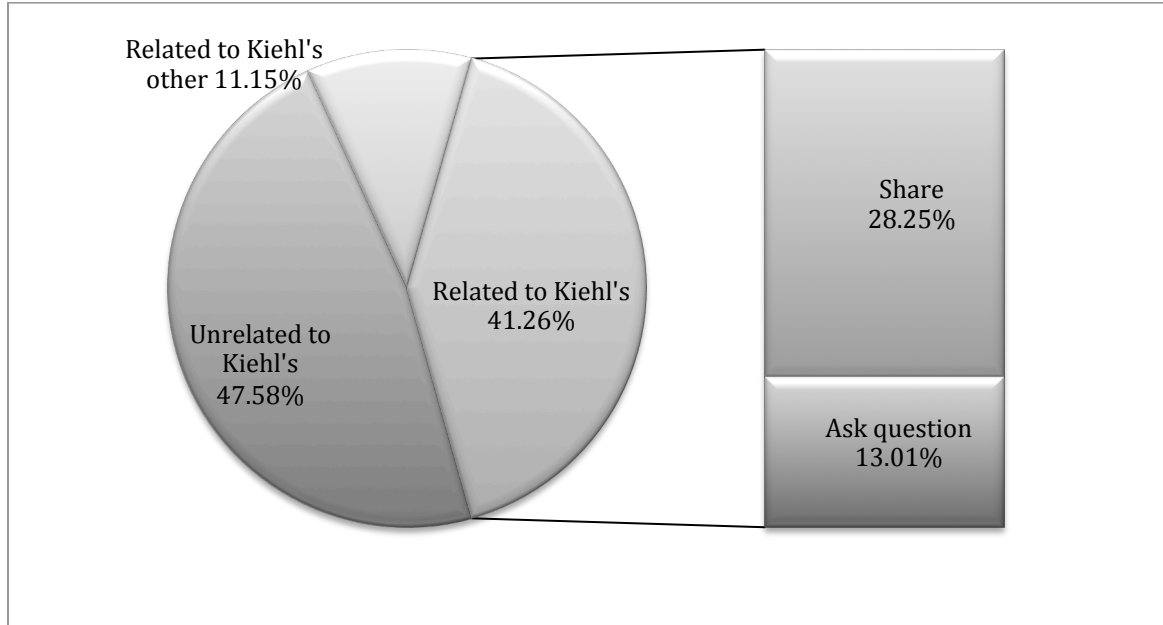


Figure 13. Actions in the Interacting Comments between Followers (C2-1).

In the 167 responding comments provided by kiehl's to followers, 170 action-object pairs were identified, including 67.65% of all actions which are “answer question” and 13.53% which are “suggest”; and these top two most frequent actions altogether account for 81.18% (see Figure 14). Kiehl's mainly answered questions about “usage”, “function”, “product availability”, and suggested “a product”. In addition, there were 83 total action-object pairs identified from the 78 responding comments from followers back to Kiehl's (C3); the most frequently occurring action were “ask question”, which account for 22.89%; and there were 46 brand-unrelated comments (58.97%) in C3 (see Figure 15). Followers mainly asked about “usage” and “recommendation”.

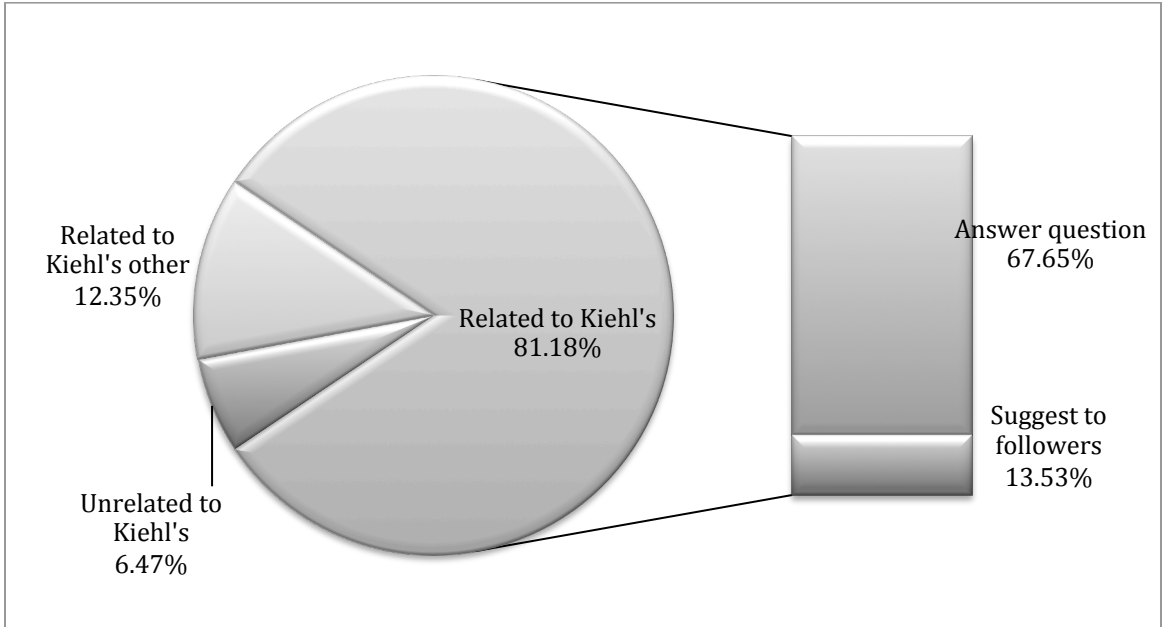


Figure 14. Actions in the Responding Comments from Kiehl's to Followers (C2-2).

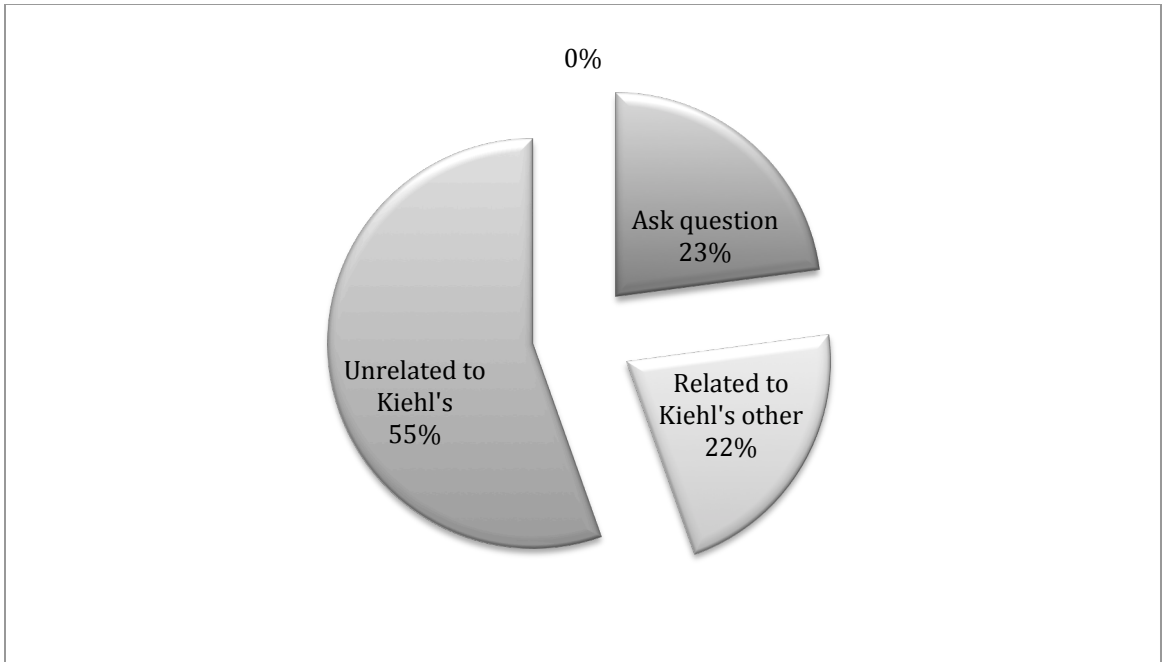


Figure 15. Actions in the Responding Comments from Followers to Kiehl's (C3).

In addition to the analysis of the posts’ content, demographic information (i.e., location) of each commenter was collected; and, the number of retail stores, located in different districts in China, had been examined as well (see Table 10). Figure 16 shows that about 70% of followers were from 13 locations with at least one retail store each; about 46% followers were from 4 locations with more than one retail stores each, including Shanghai, Zhejiang, Beijing, Sichuan; and, other 24% were from 9 locations with only one retail store each, such as Jiangsu, Huber, Tianjin, Hunan. There were other 30% of followers came from 14 locations with no retail store, including followers from aboard or other unidentified locations. However, comparing to other 12 “non-store” locations (e.g. Taiwan, Xinjiang, Neimenggu, Jilin) which had a very small number of followers, in two locations (i.e., Guangdong and Fujian) there were a large number of followers, which account for about 16% of all followers, although there is no retail store in these two locations.

Table 10

<i>Location of Active Followers</i>			
Location	Count	Percentage	Number of store
Shanghai	441	20.02%	4
Guangdong	280	12.71%	
Zhejiang	247	11.21%	3
Beijing	222	10.08%	4
Jiangsu	203	9.21%	1

Sichuan	107	4.86%	2
Hubei	89	4.04%	1
Abroad	85	3.86%	
Other	83	3.77%	
Fujian	67	3.04%	
Tianjin	55	2.50%	1
Hunan	50	2.27%	1
Liaoning	44	2.00%	1
Chongqing	32	1.45%	
Guangxi	29	1.32%	
Shandong	23	1.04%	1
Anhui	21	0.95%	
Shanxi	19	0.86%	1
Yunnan	19	0.86%	1
Henan	18	0.82%	1
Hebei	17	0.77%	
Heilongjiang	11	0.50%	
Shanxi	10	0.45%	
Hong Kong	9	0.41%	
Jiangxi	8	0.36%	
Jilin	6	0.27%	

Neimenggu	4	0.18%
Xinjiang	3	0.14%
Taiwan	1	0.05%

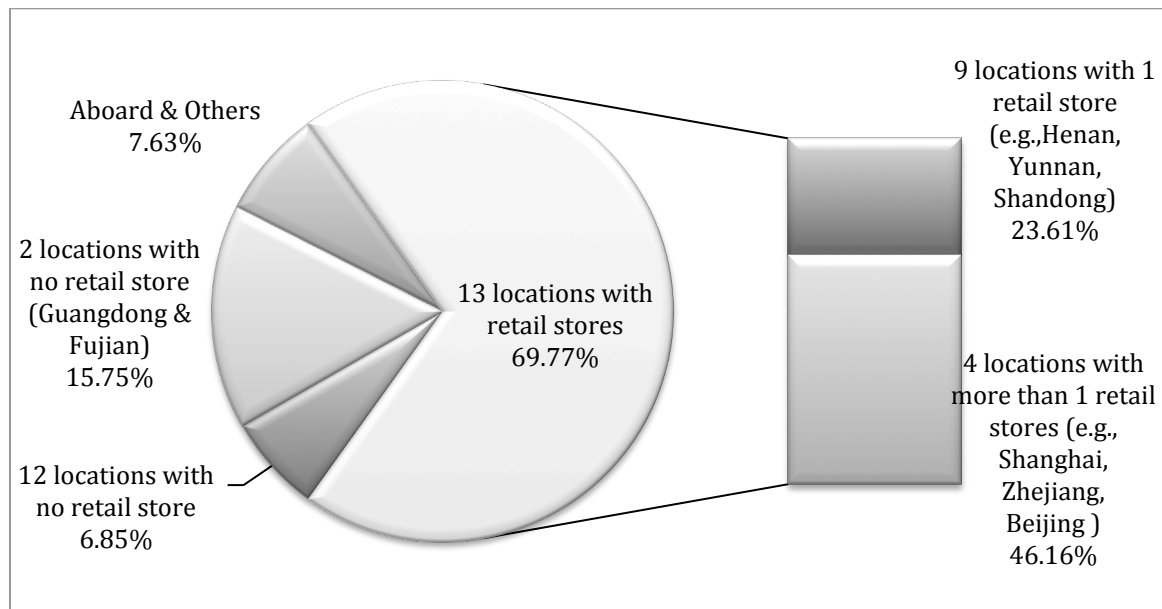


Figure 16. Location of Followers.

4.3 Research Question #3: What are the patterns (users' information, content of posts) of customers' brand-related micro-blogging as e-WOM?

By examining customers' brand-related micro-blogging posts that were published during a fourteen day period, I analyzed the data of 400 total posts in terms of content range, micro-blogging usage, and the number of comments and reposts received. With regard to the content, 209 posts (52.25%) were the participation to a corporate-initiative online activity; the other 199 posts (47.75%) were original posts that the content of such

posts was generated by customers in order to share their experience of using or to inquire about recommendations of certain products from Kiehl's. Concerning 209 online-activity engaging posts, there were approximately 15 people who participated in the corporate-initiative online activity every day.

People who published the brand-related micro-blog posts are usually individual users of the SINA Weibo; they were also following other personal, corporate, and organizational accounts like Kiehl's, and had their own followers. As shown in Table 11, in the individual accounts of customers who published these 191 customers' original posts, the average number of posts that has been published was 1738, the average number of other SINA Weibo accounts they were following was 309.8, and the average number of followers they had was 1087.4. Moreover, there were an average of 3.3 comments and 1.2 reposts received by each consumer's original post. In all the customers' original posts, 72.77% of posts contained an image of the products that the consumer bought or used; 31.41% included at least one animated expression to show their corresponding emotion. In addition, besides using the term "@Account Name" to remind Kiehl's, 13.09% of the original posts used the sign @ for informing their own followers, to acquire attention from them and to stimulate interaction with them.

Table 11

Customers' Original Brand-related Micro-blogging

In 191 original posts	Number	Average	Percentage
Following	59178	309.8	
Followers	207700	1087.4	
Posts	331951	1738	
Be commented	630	3.3	
Be reposted	228	1.2	
Image of products	139		72.77%
Animated expression	60		31.41%
Friends reminding	25		13.09%

In terms of the content of the customers' original posts, the same content analysis approach had been used. Totally, 35 unique action-object pairs and 261 total action-object pairs were identified in the 191 original posts. The most frequent action was "share", which account for 39.46% of all actions, followed with the action "positive expression" (26.82%), and "ask question" (23.77%), which altogether account for 90.05% of all pairs (see Figure 17).

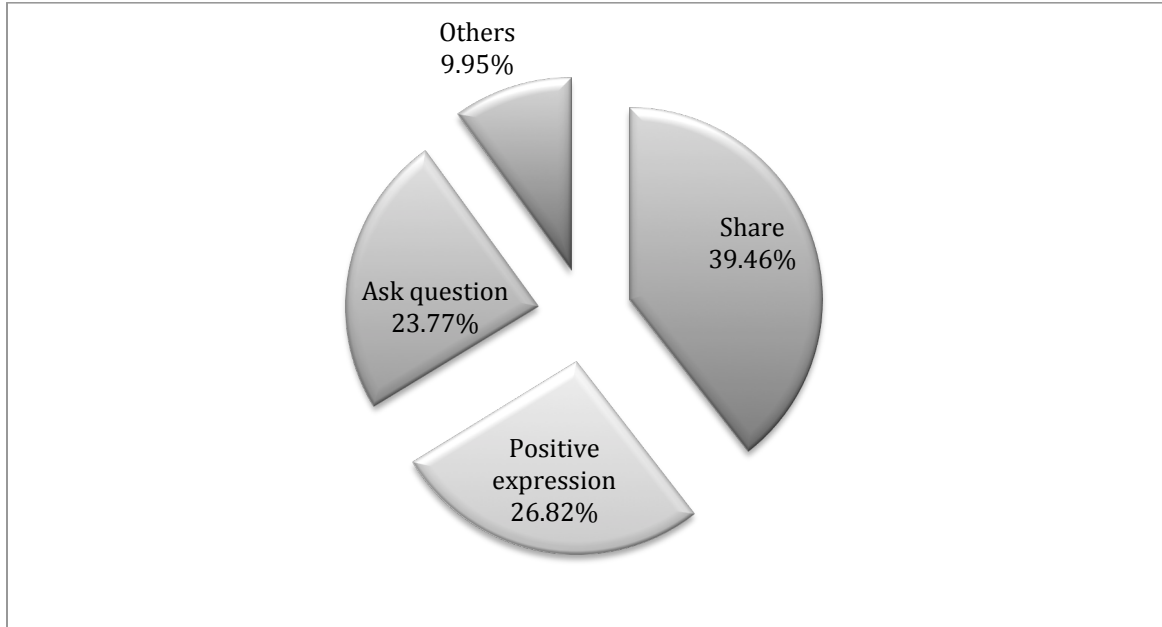


Figure 17. Actions in the Customers' Brand-related Posts.

As shown in Table 12, the top two most frequent action-object pairs were “share purchasing” (22.22%) and “share experience of using” (12.64%), followed with “positive expression about a product” (9.20%) and “ask question about usage” (8.05%). Asking questions was a main topic of the customers’ original brand-related posts. However, after asking questions about the usage of products and product availability, or inquiring about the recommendations of certain products, customers only received 18 responses from Kiehl’s. Thus, the percentage of questions responded and solved is 29.03%. In addition, 63.63% of the individual users who published the brand-related posts were from the province that has at least one Kiehl’s retail store.

Table 12

The Most Frequently Action-object Pairs in the Customers' Original Brand-related Posts

Action	Object	Count	Percentage
	Purchasing	58	22.22%
	Experience of using	33	12.64%
	In-store event	6	2.30%
	Product sample	4	1.53%
	Function	2	0.77%
Share	A product	24	9.20%
	Function	17	6.51%
	All Kiehl's products	17	6.51%
Positive expression	Experience of using	12	4.60%
	Usage	21	8.05%
	Recommendation	18	6.90%
	Product availability	8	3.07%
	A product	5	1.92%
	Function	4	1.53%
	Experience of using	4	1.53%
	Ask question	Packaging	2
Total		235	94.25%

5 Discussion, Conclusion and Implication

As previously reviewed, Jansen et al. (2009) suggest a branding model, in which consumers' purchase behaviors are affected by both brand image and brand awareness. Micro-blogging would have a direct influence on these two components of brand knowledge (Esch et al., 2006). Brand knowledge affects future purchases via a brand relationship, which includes brand satisfaction, brand trust, and brand attachment. This provides a reference point for my interpretation of results. In this section, by discussing how Kiehl's employs its corporate SINA Weibo account to communicate with its followers and how followers participate in this type of online conversation, we could make conclusions about how this Chinese micro-blogging application is used by businesses as a communication tool, and offer implications about how to leverage Sina Weibo as a crucial part of integrated marketing strategy to build brand knowledge and brand relationship.

5.1 Research Question #1: What are the patterns (number, time and content of posts) of corporate micro-blogging?

Social media marketers will generate customers' attention by focusing on creating content (Ernestad and Henriksson, 2010). The content analysis of all corporate posts revealed that Kiehl's published information that was relevant to four categories, including product, retailing, brand and marketing. Kiehl's posts enable customers to keep up with the latest news of the company, by the introduction of the function or usage of a product, sharing the brand culture, the announcement of a new retail store. In Kiehl's SINA Weibo

account, posts that fall into the category “product” and “brand” account for almost ninety percent of all original corporate posts. This implies that SINA Weibo is a social media platform for Kiehl’s marketers to communicate the detailed information of product and brand to customers directly.

5.1.1 Product knowledge

About forty-seven percent of all Kiehl’s corporate original posts discussed products in some way, such as introducing the function and usage of a product, introducing a new product. It implies that the Kiehl’s SINA Weibo account can be considered as an information source about its products. Moreover, followers’ comments about products comprise over half of all comments provided by followers, such as asking questions about the usage of a product, sharing the experience of using a certain product, and providing positive expression about a product. It appears that, for followers the corporate micro-blogging in a sense serves as a virtual community for them to seek information and share knowledge about the products.

Customers do not want to be sold a product, but instead want to be reliably informed in order to make a wise purchasing decision (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). About 70% of customers have visited social media sites to seek information, and 49% of these customers have made a purchase decision based on the information that they found through the social media sites (DEI Worldwide, 2008). Thus, companies should educate customers about product knowledge by providing adequate information about the products in micro-blogging. And, the content of these corporate posts about product

knowledge can include different perspectives of products. If customers obtain a good product knowledge that helps them make a sound purchasing decision, a brand trust can be formed and the brand satisfaction might increase.

5.1.2 Corporate-initiated online activities

From the results, it appears that the Kiehl's corporate posts about the corporate-initiated online activities, which are associated with "marketing", received most attention from followers in micro-blogging. These posts received the most comments (on average 98 per post), which account for twenty-five percent of all followers' comments. However, only about two point five percent of all corporate posts are announcing the corporate initiated online activities. A good example of the corporate-initiated online activities is that Kiehl's asked followers to obtain a blank packaging label from a real store, to submit the graphic design for the label by micro-blogging, and then to participate in a competition for a prize. Typically, followers who participate in these kinds of activities will be put into a drawing for a prize. It is highly possible that due to the attractiveness of prize and low investment in time and effort followers have a strong desire to participate in this kind of online activity. Thus these "marketing" posts were responded well.

Compared to other marketing communication tools, the cost of getting customers involved with the marketing campaign in micro-blogging is much lower. Moreover, the cost of marketing communication is quite high in China, due to the involvement of a generally-large number of target audiences. By launching more corporate-initiated online

activity, companies can create a good opportunity for stimulating more customers to engage. Customers' involvement may help to build brand attachment, and brand relationship in the end. Overall, corporate micro-blogging can be employed as a viable tool for marketing campaigns in light of the low costs and high degree of engagements.

5.1.3 Brand image

Corporate posts which are associated with "brand" received the least comments (8.2 per post), comparing to other three categories of the corporate posts' content, "marketing" (98 per post), "product" (22 per posts) and "retailing" (22 per posts). Kiehl's has made much effort on communicating information about the brand; about 42% of the original posts were directly related to brand image, such as sharing the brand culture, announcing the charity campaign and sharing an award that Kiehl's won. It appears that followers were not interested in this type of information, or probably the content of the "brand"-related posts were not able to drive followers' involvement into an online conversation with Kiehl's and other followers.

Micro-blogging provides a great opportunity for companies to shape the brand image and extend the influence on consumers' perceptions (Li, Cao, J, L, & Y, 2011). In the model of branding of micro-blogging (Jansen et al., 2009), the brand image along with brand awareness can be influenced by micro-blogging significantly, as both play a crucial role on customers' purchasing decisions. Thus, the marketing team of Kiehl's might need to consider whether their micro-blogging marketing strategies are appropriate and effective in terms of the choice of the posts' content. Marketers must decide whether

the content of posts which are associated with the brand image needs to be adjusted in order to stimulate the involvement of the customers, based on a careful investigation on followers' interaction and feedback in micro-blogging.

5.1.4 Posting time

Kiehl's SINA Weibo account is very active during the posting time, from 8 am to 11 am, 1 pm to 2 pm, and 3 pm to 5 pm. According to a research on the pattern of posting time of SINA Weibo corporate micro-blogging ("The pattern of posting", 2011), the interaction of users is becoming more active after lunch time (between 1 pm to 2 pm), around dinner time (between 5 pm to 8 pm) during the weekend, and after dinner time (8 pm to 11 pm) during weekdays. It appears that the time between 5 pm to 11 pm has not been utilized fully by Kiehl's.

Micro-blogging is different from any other format of social media in virtue of the features of instantaneity and interaction. Companies need to actively engage in two-way communications, as well as to interact with customers in a real-time manner, even after work-hours. The time of the posting is a crucial factor that may impact the extent to which customers participate in the online conversation, since any post can be easily covered by the latest one and become less visible. Thus, marketers need to examine the number of comments and reposts for each post in order to ensure a high degree of customer involvement, and adjust the strategy of posting time.

5.2 Research Question #2: What are the patterns (number and content of comments, location of active followers) of micro-blogging interaction between the company and its followers?

Micro-blogging communication is not one-way and linear. Being different from traditional media, micro-blogging has an advantage of promoting strong interactions and strengthening customer relationship by providing real-time and two-way interactions. From the results, it appears that Kiehl's provides customers a platform to connect with the company and other customers, share opinions, express feelings, provide feedback, ask questions, and get answers. Given the ease of monitoring of customers' sentiments, opinions and involvement in micro-blogging, companies can view micro-blogging as a competitive intelligence source, which provides valuable information about a large number of customers. Besides conducting the customer survey or interview of the focus group to obtain the real feelings of customers, marketers should make an effort to track and evaluate the customers' micro-blogging interaction with the companies and other customers. It will provide valuable and clear ideas about how to make practical improvements on the products and services, which can help increase customers' brand satisfaction in the future.

5.2.1 Positive and negative expression

More than twenty-five percent of followers' comments include a sentiment, either a positive expression (above 21%) or a negative expression (nearly 5 %). Followers of the Kiehl's corporate account express their opinions about the company, and they express

them by commenting in micro-blogging. Comments with a positive expression received by Kiehl's corporate posts show customers' satisfaction toward a certain product, the overall brand, and the experience of using a product the most. The positive feelings and feedbacks of real customers may have a big influence on the brand perceptions of other customers as well as the purchasing decisions as an effect of e-WOM. Thus, businesses can generate strong brand awareness and brand image without a large expenditure on marketing and advertising (Jansen et al., 2009).

Negative feedbacks can facilitate companies to recognize consumers' preferences, identify the product defects, and correct the inadvertent mistakes (Jansen et al., 2009). Among the comments with a negative expression in Kiehl's corporate account, there are similarities, such as complaining that customers won but have not received the prize, products are out of stock when customers want to purchase in store, customers feel uncomfortable while using a product, the claimed function is not shown after using, the packaging of a lipstick is not convenient for applying the product on the lips, and the service quality of sales assistants in a retail store is poor. These negative comments permit a direct customer expression of their negative experience of the products or services, and companies can establish database of customer reviews toward the brand and its products or services for effective and systematic resolutions.

After receiving these negative expressions from the customers, Kiehl's responded some of them. For example, Kiehl's followed up the complaint about the service quality of the sales assistants in a retail store, and told the customer that the company has been

informed about this issue and will deal with it as soon as possible. Companies need to listen to the opinions and feedbacks of customers, as well as actively engage in online conversations with them. For example, sharing the company's regret and appreciation, and providing practical suggestions to resolve problems may make customers feel valued. As such, it will also encourage customers to publish more information that is engaged in e-WOM.

5.2.2 Customer service

In their comments the followers of Kiehl's corporate account asked the most questions about the usage, function, availability, price and recommendation of products, which account for about seventeen percent of all questions asked by followers. They also ask questions about the real store location and promotion. Such comments that asked questions account for about twenty-two percent of the followers' comments. Thus, customers in micro-blogging may see the corporate micro-blog account as a place to contact the company to make an inquiry about the companies. On the one hand, from these questions, marketers can recognize what information has not been communicated to their audience clearly, and this may lead to improved efficiency in communication. On the other hand, corporate micro-blogging is a promising marketing tool for providing effective customer service to find and solve customer's problems instantly. Sixty-two percent of consumers in U.S. have used social media for the issues of customer service (Zendesk, 2010).

However, only 23% of all questions followers that were asked by followers through commenting were answered by Kiehl's. A similar percentage of questions in customers' brand-related posts were answered. It raises an important issue for micro-blogging as a good channel for building and managing brand relationship, that is, how should the company deal with customers' questions and inquiries? There were four similar comments with regard to negative expression about micro-blog interaction with Kiehl's. Followers complained that they have asked Kiehl's questions by commenting in micro-blogging, but have never received any response from the company. This led to dissatisfaction with Kiehl's and made them consider using other beauty brands and products. Those customers are being honest in sharing their dissatisfaction, but there probably are other customers who just simply switch their interests and loyalty to other brands without expressing their dissatisfaction and negative feelings. According to Hsu et al. (2010), consumers' satisfaction with corporate micro-blogging has positive influences on commitment, trust, a sense of community, and behavioral intentions. Therefore, companies should not simply provide a place for customers to voice out their feeling, but pay more attentions and try to solve these concerns. It will likely to enhance customers' brand satisfaction and trust in the end.

5.2.3 Social interaction among customers

Concerning the interaction among the followers of Kiehls' in micro-blogging, they were sharing their experience of using a product, sharing their understanding about the usage and function of a product or asking questions about products, in about 28% of

all interacting comments between each other. In addition, almost half of such conversations are unrelated to Kiehl's, which means that followers not only share opinions about products and brands, they also socialize as friends discussing other things, such as music or movies in this virtual community. With the commenting feature in micro-blogging, followers can view other comments and reply to them by providing a new comment to the corporate post. Thus the online social interaction between followers occurs. Social media becoming popular and used by a great number of Internet users is probably because of human beings' need of being social (Wanrui, 2010). Therefore, marketers should try to provide more absorbing topics in posts in order to trigger more interaction between followers in micro-blogging, which can build a sense of belonging into this online community. A favorable experience with other users in this virtual community customers have may increase their brand attachment, which is playing a big role in brand relationship.

5.2.4 Location of customers

Information about the location of followers provides valuable insights for marketers to generate an effective marketing plan. My findings suggested that there is an observable relationship between the location of Kiehl's retail stores and the number of followers. In general, the more retail stores in a given location, the more followers there are. So, if companies want to obtain more customers' involvement and interaction in micro-blogging, they might think about opening more retail stores. Ernestad and Henriksson (2010) suggested that the access to users' demographic and behavioral

information can help marketers to create highly specified and relevant advertisements with much less effort and cost. By knowing the locations that have more followers, such as Shanghai, Zhejiang, Beijing, Jiangsu, Sichuan, and Hubei, Kiehl's can provide more mix online and offline marketing activities on these locations. It may help attract more target audiences with less effort and cost.

Compared to the locations in which there are a large number of active followers, some other real store locations, such as Henan, Yunnan and Shanxi, have much fewer active followers. In the perspective of marketing, social media marketing should be one part of an integrated marketing communication plan, instead of a standalone marketing strategy. While Kiehl's posts news about the opening of new retail stores, the Kiehl's SINA Weibo should also be promoted to customers in their retail stores to obtain more followers in micro-blogging and more customer involvement into this virtual community, which may help strengthen the brand relationship with customers. Moreover, Kiehl's may consider opening more retail stores in some locations like Jiangsu, Hubei, Fujian and Guangdong in China, since customers from these areas actively engage in micro-blogging and interact with Kiehl's, although there is very small number of retail stores or even no retail store in these areas yet. There was about 16% of all followers came from Guangdong and Fujian, although no retail store in these two locations. I assumed that this group of followers might be technologically adapted, since micro-blogging is a new trend of social media and requires users' capability in computer and Internet. Moreover, they may have

strong intention to purchase beauty and cosmetic products and could be considered as hedonic consumers.

5.3 Research Question #3: What are the patterns (users' information, content of posts) of customers' brand-related micro-blogging as e-WOM?

Concerning the customers' posts those are related to Kiehl's, the main topics include sharing the products they bought, sharing their experiences of using a product, and expressing positive opinions toward a product are. By posting information about Kiehl's in their individual micro-blog, customers are sharing their satisfaction and trust towards this brand with their own followers. Bernard and Mimi (2009) investigated the effect of e-WOM in micro-blogging and found that almost twenty percent of individual users' micro-blog posts had mentioned a brand name, products or companies. Thus, how to make use of these brand-related posts as e-WOM to promote the brand is becoming a critical issue for marketers. In the Kiehl's corporate posts, about twenty-five percent are reposts of this type of customers' brand-related posts, which are mainly used to suggest or share a product, and introduce the function of a product. For companies that use micro-blogging as a branding tool, reposting the customers' brand-related posts in the corporate account is an effective way to enlarge the exposure of these positive referrals, and thus, extend the influence of e-WOM onto other customers through micro-blogging.

Moreover, according to the analysis of usage behaviors of this group of communicators, the average number of followers they have is over 1000. In addition, the average number of posts they published is about 1800 posts. This group of people uses

micro-blogging frequently and actively, and has strong intentions to express themselves and socialize with other individuals and businesses. In terms of the content of such customers' brand-related micro-blogging, more than seventy percent contain images of Kiehl's products that the consumer bought or used which makes the posts informative. Therefore, the effect of e-WOM of these customers' brand-related posts on others' perceptions of Kiehl's as well as their purchasing decisions could be significant.

Micro-blogging provides a venue into what customers really feel about the brand. According to DEI Worldwide (2008), 60% of social media users were willing to use social media applications to pass along information to others online; 45% of those who searched for information through social media had engaged in WOM. Thus, corporate micro-blogging is a great channel for spreading customers' positive e-WOM, which may have a big impact on the customers' brand perception and purchasing decisions. Marketers should spend more time on searching and checking this type of customers' e-WOM in micro-blogging, and encourage more e-WOM from customers by sharing appreciation and providing small gifts to these customers.

6 Limitation and Future Research

Naturally, there are limitations to this study. First, only one SINA Weibo corporate account in a particular industry has been examined in this case study. The micro-blogging of other companies and other product categories may differ in the pattern of communication. In addition, the behavior of the interaction of followers with companies in micro-blogging and their brand-related micro-blogging may be different. Second, since all of the data that I collected from the Chinese micro-blogging website was originally in Chinese, and then, translated into English for data analysis, the translation may cause a limitation, since some messages might be missing or altered. Finally, due to limited time and energy, there is another limitation on the quantity of data in this study. Thus, the results may not be able to represent the changing population of the SINA Weibo corporate posts, the followers' comments and customers' brand-related posts if such change exists, and the conclusion and implication most likely cannot be fully applied to other brands.

For future research, it would be interesting to investigate the micro-blogging usage of other brands from a different industry or a different product category. Other than a case study, researchers can conduct a comparison of the communication pattern of several corporate micro-blogging accounts. Moreover, using a mixed method with an interview or survey to corporate account followers and marketers may provide interesting understandings about how corporate micro-blogging has an impact on customers'

perception on brand knowledge and brand relationship, as well as the current and future purchasing decisions of customers through the quantitative measurements.

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