

Disrupt, Disintermediate, Disseminate: Twitter and the Music Industry

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"just setting up my twtr. 9:50 PM March 21, 2006"

- @Jack Dorsey, Twitter Co-Founder<sup>1</sup>

The aforementioned quotation may soon feature the most defining characters representing the grand narrative of a generation. Since its "tipping point" at the entertainment conference South by Southwest Interactive in early 2007, the micro-blogging service of 140-character fame has become increasingly synonymous with daily life.<sup>2</sup> This has been complimented by the global trend towards mobile technology, perpetuated by unparalleled levels of accessibility. Twitter has propelled itself into the forefront of social, political and economic change. Twitter's user-generated content has been adopted by both the private and public sectors. Today, Twitter acts as a global medium of communication for the masses.<sup>3</sup>

This work will take an analytical and critical approach in evaluating the theoretical concepts and applicability of the third party application Twitter and its use within the music industry.

## Disruption

In order to best illustrate Twitter as a disruptive model within the music industry, one must first analyze its use within the public sphere. This can be achieved through the deconstruction of Twitter usage on both macro and micro levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas, N. "Twitter blows up at SXSW Conference." *Gawker*, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, N. "Twitter blows up at SXSW Conference." *Gawker*, 2007. & Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Diriöz, A O. "Twitter and the Middle East." *Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies* 5(1) (2013): 67-75.

## *The Impact of Twitter on a Macro-Level*

On a macro scale, Twitter has proven to be an active catalyst in social change, in both applied and theoretical applications. Instances of such change can be illustrated over the better half of a decade following such events as "the Arab Spring (since 2010), the protests following the 2009 Iranian Presidential elections (2009-2010), and the Gezi park protests since the summer 2013".<sup>4</sup> This can be depicted through the social development of Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" as applied through various social movements in the Middle-East. In essence, these events portray a shift in the Panopticon as an authoritative tool, to a device used in furthering social autonomy.<sup>5</sup> In order to discuss and analyze this transformation it is important to set the stage for the events of interest that have ensued.

Although an attempt to define these aforementioned occurrences would prove to be a near-impossible task due to their unique position in both time and space, there are some commonalities upon which we can draw. For instance, it is generally regarded that some form of a social binary is in place that oppresses a group or marginalized group within the S2 category.<sup>6</sup> However, as seen through these various social movements or, in some cases, revolutions, Twitter represents the opportunities for like-minded individuals to form a synchronized thought or message. This is not only limited to a digital space, but also accessible in the physical world. Regardless of one's tendencies towards certain schools of thought on collective behaviour, the ability to have a voice in a traditionally limited space has enabled the opportunity for actionable change. This change can also be

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<sup>4</sup> Diriöz, A O. "Twitter and the Middle East." *Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies* 5(1) (2013): 67-75.

<sup>5</sup> Bentham, J. *The Panopticon Writings*. London, United Kingdom: Verso, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, M. "'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality." *Economy and Society* 30(2) (2001): 190-207.

seen through the wide-scale adoption of Twitter as the fastest growing and active social networks in the Arab world.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of such unprecedented accessibility can be seen through the development of the Panopticon. In essence this was a social product conceived out of the writings of Jeremy Bentham in his evaluation of the prison and convict reformation. The basic premise of his writings on the Panopticon focus around the idea of:

“a building circular... The prisoners in their cells, occupying the circumference—  
The officers in the center. By blinds and other contrivances, the Inspectors  
concealed... from the observation of the prisoners: hence the sentiment of a sort of  
omnipresence—The whole circuit reviewable with little, or... without any, change  
of place. One station in the inspection part affording the most perfect view of  
every cell.”<sup>8</sup>

Bentham’s idea is focused around the concept of maximizing social control while minimizing capital costs.<sup>9</sup> The influence of surveillance was particularly important as the individual actor, under fear of constantly being supervised (omnipresence), would in turn be more likely conform to social norms and abstain from deviant behaviour.<sup>10</sup> As such, its progression can be marked and explored through recent movements in the Middle-East—events that have in part acted as a catalyst in this transformation of Panopticon as a bureaucratic tool of authority and social control into a device of total autonomy.

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<sup>7</sup> Diriöz, A O. "Twitter and the Middle East." *Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies* 5(1) (2013): 67-75.

<sup>8</sup> Bentham, J. *Proposal for a New and Less Expensive mode of Employing and Reforming Convicts*. Edinburgh, Scotland: William Tait, 1798.

<sup>9</sup> Bentham, J. *The Panopticon Writings*. London, United Kingdom: Verso, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Bentham, J. *The Panopticon Writings*. 1995.

The importance of these movements can be seen through a newly-found global presence that acts as a series of cheques and balances, ensuring and monitoring the situation as a form of counter-surveillance or protection between the traditional paradigms of social binaries.

Thus Twitter can have a greater significance in society as a functional imperative in a broader holistic sense rather than just a service or tool of entertainment. Further, Twitter's sustainability within entertainment culture is directly related to its larger stake within a connected global community. Twitter remains a leader in entertainment spheres because entertainment as a culture is a part of a broader global social fabric.

Although it may have emerged through the entertainment sphere, its development into the social consciousness of the global populace will remain its key in an effort towards sustainability or until a substitution/alternative emerges. It is due to its global position that the barriers of entry remain high and devoid of social alternatives with similar high levels of accessibility.

Therefore, It is through the development of an idea or synchronization of a group that evokes and creates conversation. It is these widespread levels of communication that extrapolate the effects of a songs or works share-ability and thus variability. Similar to social movements, it follows the same geographic patterns, geo-specific or acts that break locally and expand globally.<sup>11</sup> This idea will be discussed in greater lengths through the disintermediation chapter within the work.

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<sup>11</sup> Passman, D S. *All You Need to Know About the Music Business* . New York, New York: Free Press, 2012.

## *The Impact of Twitter on a Micro Level*

Another major cause for the success of Twitter can be seen in the social value ascribed through the process of obtaining “followers,” “retweets” and “favourites.” In a digital world, regardless if credited through the adoption of escapism or a real value associated within the dichotomy between that of the digital and physical world, there is a “truist” notion associated with personal worth and value as it pertains to one’s social viability in this digital space.<sup>12</sup>

As such, the “Law of Networks” states that the value of a network is proportional to the square numbers of connected users, therefore the value of these individuals units must also play a pivotal role the evaluation of a network.<sup>13</sup> Thus the value of these individuals units can most accurately be measured through the exploration of one’s “social capital.”<sup>14</sup>

Due to the scope of this paper, the term, “Social Capital” will be constructed by way of a more modern development of the concept through the summation of the works of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam.<sup>15</sup> In essence, social capital is the basic unit that represents the “social relationships between people that enable productive outcomes.”<sup>16</sup> However, it is important to acknowledge that this conceptualization draws

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<sup>12</sup> Shima, R., Matthews, R., Pourghasem, M., and Hughes, I. "Internet Technology And Social Capital: How The Internet Affects Seniors' Social Capital And Wellbeing." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14: 202-220.

<sup>13</sup> Odlyzko, A., and Tilly, B. "A refutation of Metcalfe's Law and a better estimate for the value of networks and network interconnections", University of Minnesota, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Gittel, R., and Vidal, A. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Gittel, R., and Vidal, A. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Szreter, S. “ Social capital, the economy and education in historical perspective.” *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives* 1 (1) (2002): 56-77.

upon interdisciplinary associations to works of Durkheim, Simmel, Marx and Weber and to theories such as social exchange theory and psychological contract theory.<sup>17</sup>

*Social Capital: Gittel and Vidal's "Bonding" and "Bridging"*

It is within the definition of "Social Capital" that emerges two very strong distinctions. As deconstructed by Gittel and Vidal, "Social Capital" can be broken down into two social actions, "social bonding" and "social bridging."<sup>18</sup>

Bonding in social capital refers "to networks, whose individuals prescribe to a set of similar 'likeness' based the characteristics of its members' perceived social status or orientation of thought."<sup>19</sup> This can be strongly associated with the action of "following" a user or the act of "retweeting" a follower.

In comparison, "bridging" constitutes social networking based on the association of individuals and their collective desire to achieve a goal regardless of social background.<sup>20</sup> These associations can be seen in items like "trending topics" or users that act as bridging units with popular tags like #FF (Follow Fridays) or #NewMusic (New Music).

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<sup>17</sup> Giddens, A. *New Rules of Sociological Method : A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Woolcock, M., and Narayan, D. "Social Capital: implications for development theory, research, and policy." *The World Bank Research Observer* 15(2) (2000): 225-49.

<sup>19</sup> Gittel, R., and Vidal, A. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Gittel, R., and Vidal, A. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. 1998.



## Disintermediation

The wide scale adoption of Twitter has created unparalleled access to potential music consumers and, as such, there has been a recent trend within the music industry to find new and innovative ways to implement social statistical-based analytics within the artist discovery process. This can be characterized by partnerships such as the 300 Entertainment and Twitter agreement, as well as the release of both Billboard and Twitter's real-time based music charts.

### *Moneyball Music*

The 300 Entertainment and Twitter Partnership was announced at the beginning of the year at the Reed MIDEM music conference in Cannes, France, adding weight to the appearance of this recent trend within the industry.<sup>21</sup> Although no efforts have yet to be publicly available, it does note the significance of what Forbes author Greenberg refers to as "Moneyball" music. The "Moneyball" music theory is based on the statistically-emphasized approach to American baseball signings with the Oakland Athletics baseball club.<sup>22</sup> This could be problematic within the arts space, as art is inherently subjective and thus near impossible to quantify. Yet it may prove a likely complimentary tool to rationalize the signing of new artists within the Artist and Repertoire portfolio.

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<sup>21</sup> Smirke, R. "Lyor Cohen Unveils 300 Partnership With Twitter During Midem Keynote." *Billboardbiz*, February 02, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Greenburg, Z O. "Lyor Cohen's 300 And The Dawn Of The Moneyball Record Label." *Forbes*, February 28, 2014.

## *#NowPlaying*

To this end, Twitter has continued to make steps to increase its offerings with an up-to-the minute chart system based on social actions over the platform, using predetermined hashtags such as #nowplaying or the abbreviated #NP.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, these charts can be deconstructed into “established” and “emerging” artists. This distinction can be made through the accumulation of an act’s followers, where an act with 50 000 Twitter followers or more is considered to be established, while 49 999 or fewer followers is considered to be emerging.<sup>24</sup>

This poses an interesting avenue for the discovery process, though it does raise a couple key concerns. The first is the education process, similar to the proposed adoption of any new technology. For instance, with Spotify music streaming and data usage on mobile networks, there has been very little promotion by way of education for the public on the chart model, aside from posts on their respective platforms and a couple of blogging aggregates.<sup>25</sup> For a system that relies so heavily on public sharing and the social aggregation using the hashtag method, it illustrates a certain level of trepidation in regards to accuracy and therefore, usability and legitimacy as a measure of artist discovery.

The second issue is also based off of the concerns of the accuracy of measurement. According to the “Frequently Asked Questions” portion on the official Billboard website, the platform notes that there is a weighted system associated with positive and negative tweets. For instance, “the charts factor in both positive and negative comments included in a tweet when determining whether it counts towards a

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<sup>23</sup> Gruger, W. "Billboard Twitter Real-Time Charts Go Live." *Billboard*, May 27, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Billboard "Billboard Twitter Real-Time Charts FAQ" Billboard.

[http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/japan/export-import.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/japan/export-import.html) (accessed June 13, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> The Lefsetz Letter: Truths. <http://lefsetz.com/wordpress/index.php/archives/2014/04/24/truths/>.

track's ranking."<sup>26</sup> However, the rankings are biased towards positive or neutral connotations when the track is shared, since most negative tweets do not include a song link or a track-sharing hashtag like #nowplaying.<sup>27</sup>

This raises the question, how is this accomplished? If one refers to the recent work of authors Arias, Arratia et al, in "Forecasting with Twitter Data", one will notice that navigating such aggregation would be extremely difficult. Although the work is focused on stock markets and possibly a more relatable prediction of gross revenue at the cinema Box Office, this process of evaluating emotional contexts was noted through the connotation such as happy and sad emoticons, which is not a comprehensive measure of positive or negative associations.<sup>28</sup> This is especially disconcerting across demographics and the eventual interpretation of multiple language sets. Therefore, how do keywords within an API account for humanistic nuances of language such as sarcasm, slang, text and grammatical error? And how does one decipher meaning from a seemingly sterile aggregation system?

## Dissemination

### *The 'Tipping Point'*

In terms of the dissemination of music content within the industry, Twitter has played a pivotal role with its scalable word-of-mouth sharing techniques. Users have the ability to not only share their favourite compositions, but can also create discourse and meaningful conversation with more trustworthy mediums than the traditional promoters of music. This success can best be illustrated through the work of Gladwell and his study

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<sup>26</sup> Billboard "Billboard Twitter Real-Time Charts FAQ" Billboard.  
[http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/japan/export-import.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/japan/export-import.html) (accessed June 13, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Billboard "Billboard Twitter Real-Time Charts FAQ" Billboard.

<sup>28</sup> Arias, M., Arriata, A., and Xuriguera, R."Forecasting with Twitter Data." *ACM Transactions on Intelligent Systems and Technology* 5 (1) (2013): 1-24.

of the “Tipping Point”, which acts as an amalgamation of social factors that culminate and extrapolate the effect of a social effort or release.<sup>29</sup>

The extent of this effect is often the result of what Gladwell calls “The Law of the Few”, where “the success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts.”<sup>30</sup> He goes on to deconstruct these individuals or entities into three distinct categories:

“*Connectors* are the people in a community who know large numbers of people and who are in the habit of making introductions; *Mavens* are “information specialists”, or “people we rely upon to connect us with new information”; and *Salesmen* are “persuaders”, charismatic people with powerful negotiation skills. They tend to have an indefinable trait that goes beyond what they say, which makes others want to agree with them.”<sup>31</sup>

Within the entertainment sphere, these categorical connectors act as vloggers, bloggers, trade magazines, other bands and celebrities. Their influence is difficult to accurately quantify, but their impact on the dissemination of musical content plays a significant role in content retention and sharing.

### *The Live Experience*

Live entertainment has amassed a significant market-share within the music industry sector and this experience-based economy has developed revenue streams and a necessity for greater social sharing. This transition can best be explained by Arthur Fogel,

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<sup>29</sup> Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. 2006.

President of Global Touring and Chairman of Global Music for Live Nation: “When I started with CPI (Live Events Company), it was all about the record; touring was about driving record sales. Fast forward to today and it is the opposite.”<sup>32</sup>

Twitter in essence has acted as a catalyst for the enhancement of this experience, not only in terms of the sharing of ideas, but also the development and sharing of experiences that traditionally has been confined musically to a physical space. This “experience effect” or “aura” can best be explained through the work of Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In essence, a live performance allows for the opportunity to create more intimate engagements between fan and artist, as well as represents a level of authenticity or aura within the sound itself and within a communal context.<sup>33</sup> This concept of “aura” can be explained through the following quotation: “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>34</sup> This use of real-time digital interaction by way of Twitter transcends this notion, as an extension of a physical form, in addition to creating alternative or sub-engagements unique within that time, but without the limitations of space.

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<sup>32</sup> Taylor, K. "Meet the most powerful man in music" *The Globe and Mail*, April 19, 2013, Music.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, W. *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, W. *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. 2008.

## Future Research

The following portion of this text is in reference to the figure attached to the document in the form of an infographic. This work will aim to identify influencers and build upon Gladwell's "Tipping Point" to hopefully pose an alternative method for the use of Twitter data within the music industry.

### *The Premise*

The premise of this graphic is to identify and arrive before the tipping point, in order to help extrapolate its effects. According to Gladwell, "Influencers are traditionally broken down into three mutually exclusive categories: Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen."<sup>35</sup> This proposition illicitly the emergence of a fourth model: "The Super Ninja" (a play off of Micheal Hills' *Lifecycle of a Social Network*' presentation for the Oxford Institute of the Internet). This fourth categorization addresses the issue of trust associated with Connectors and the reach limitations of Mavens.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Power of Context*

Numerical values and "Followers" are important, but there is greater value in active participation. This can be measured through the path of greatest resistance (a reverse utilitarian principle), where a system of measure places greater priority on the actions that require greater effort.

In this instance, a point system will provide insight: a value of 0.5 will represent a "favourite", 2.0 will represent a "retweet", 3.0 will represent a "comment" and a

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<sup>35</sup> Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Gladwell, M. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. 2006.

comment with a call to action will represent 3.5 (similar to an Edgerank, these efforts will be summed to provide an “Influencer” value).

### *The Value Chain*

“Primary Influencers” (PI) are greater than “Secondary Influencers” (SI), which are greater than “Tertiary Influencers” (TI), which in turn are greater than the “Massive Passive” (MP). The PI is the original action, where the SI social action is either shared by another user and has a user influencer value equal to 5 or greater. In this way, the TI user action is 0.5 or greater, but less than 5, and the MP no interactive user action.

### *Application*

This system will be applied to a ‘tweet’ sent by categorical “Super Ninja”, George Stroumbouloupoulos. See figure 1 regarding a cover song by an undiscovered artist, Annie Sumi.

### *General Observations*

The life cycle of a tweet seems to last between 1-2 hours (Time Decay); of the comments posted, most occur within the first hour. As we shift from Primary to Secondary and Tertiary users, there is generally less of a social imprint. Of those with multiple social network applications, most seem to focus on a primary public sharing point, rather than one distributed equally amongst the various applications.

### *Findings*

There were a total of 47 “retweets”, 69 “favourites” and 13 “comments” for a total of 179 influencer actions. Of those actions, five users both “favourited” and “retweeted”, a single user “commented” and “favourited”, while another user used all three social actions with a “comment”, “favourite” and “retweet”.

The total influencer actions were then ascribed points based on the aforementioned value proposition and summed to create a total Influencer score. These scores were then deconstructed and applied to individual users within the ecosystem of the original social action and categorized accordingly (See Figure 1).

There are two distinct outliers in this data set, the first had a network value of zero as the user had no followers, while the second (who would be considered a secondary influencer) saw social action roughly two weeks outside of the primary influencer's post and therefore did not fit this trend.

Further analysis would require this calculation to occur multiple times in order to create a more accurate average influencer score. This information would then in turn be catalogued and utilized through geo-specific marketing and outreach initiatives.

#### *#AmazonCart*

Possibly the biggest up-and-coming feature to emerge from Twitter's offerings could be the introduction of direct micro-transactions. Currently, #AmazonCart adds user's items to their "shopping cart", but Twitter currently does not take a commission from this service.<sup>37</sup> However, it does hint at the introduction of direct purchasing as attractive click-through rates and an already active base could prove as an attractive option for investors and Twitter's public offering. This could include the live auction of memorabilia at shows to the direct purchasing of music content, another favorable option, especially for independent musicians who are unable to draw the numbers to make streaming and video streaming (e.g. Youtube new agreements) a feasible or substantive revenue stream.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Newman, D. "#AmazonCart Lets You Shop On Twitter, But Is That Really Necessary?." *Forbes*, May 9, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Lunden, I. "Indie Labels Face YouTube Block Over Unsigned New Terms For Paid Service." *TechCrunch*, June 17, 2014.



In conclusion, it is evident that Twitter is a significant player within both the global and cultural sphere. Adding to this effect is the trend of the global adoption by way of mobile technology, as characterized by its high levels of accessibility.<sup>39</sup> Although Twitter initially emerged through the realm of entertainment, it has seen wide scale growth and public embracement, as is evident through the development of Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" as a tool of autonomy.<sup>40</sup> It is through this development as a disruptive technology and growth into a social imperative that the entertainment industry has begun utilizing the data collected by Twitter users to disintermediate the artist discovery process. As such, data is now becoming a complimentary tool within this process, as expressed through the Twitter and 300 Entertainment partnership as well as the implementation of real-time socially influenced music charts.<sup>41</sup> In order to create a better standing for success, it is important that this process is complimented with an education of the public and artist community to accurately and truly benefit listeners, the artist and repertoire portfolio and emerging music content creators.

Additionally, greater lengths must also focus on identifying and establishing those entities that have influence on the dissemination of music content. Providing greater emphasis on these users will enable a greater effect in the sharing and discourse surrounding the music space.

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<sup>39</sup> Diriöz, A O. "Twitter and the Middle East." *Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies* 5(1) (2013): 67-75.

<sup>40</sup> Bentham, J. *The Panopticon Writings*. London, United Kingdom: Verso, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> Smirke, R. "Lyor Cohen Unveils 300 Partnership With Twitter During Midem Keynote." *Billboardbiz*, February 02, 2014. And Billboard "Billboard Twitter Real-Time Charts FAQ" Billboard. [http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/japan/export-import.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/japan/export-import.html) (accessed June 13, 2014).

Finally, the future implementation of micro-transactions could play a pivotal role in the sustainability and growth of Twitter and its involvement within the artist community. This effort will continue to expand upon the popular effect Twitter has on power structures by creating greater diversity in the distribution environment, coupled with the adhesion of discourse and direct purchasing power.

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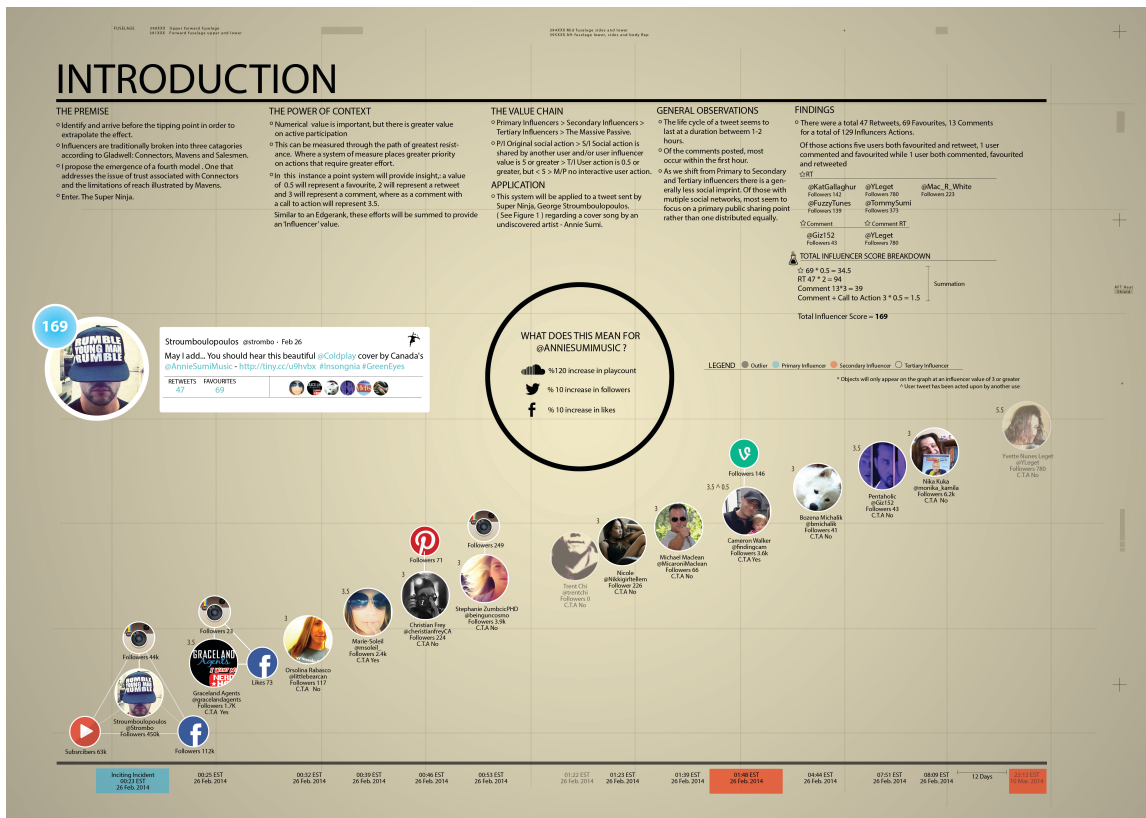
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# Appendix

## Appendix A

### Super-Ninja Infographic



Note: Appendix A is also attached to this documentation separately. A full size of this document is suggested for reading, in order to best view the details of the work.

