

## Chapter 3

# Big Data HE Communities: Could Twitter Support UK Universities Amid the COVID-19 Transition?

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter intends to explore the use of the Twitter social media platform as a microblog to share COVID-19 prescribed knowledge through observing the Twitter accounts of the five most student-populated UK universities. The chapter provides valuable practical insight to UK universities practitioners, students, and concerned stakeholders on the use of Twitter microblogs to share or retrieve knowledge required to cope with the current COVID-19 transition. The chapter sheds light on the unique characteristics of knowledge shared by UK universities through Twitter in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also highlights the unconventional use of Twitter by UK universities to share COVID-19 prescribed knowledge with their stakeholders.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The current Covid-19 pandemic has transformed many sectors in our society. Among the sectors that have been radically affected is the education sector (Devinney & Dowling, 2020). Universities were forced to move entirely from classroom education to virtual education. Although many Universities have resorted to virtual education, other Universities have not been at the same level able to face the crisis in terms of preparedness and facilitate the creation of new or amendments. It is known in crises that the key to success is not only to implement the right strategy, but rather to implement a quick strategy (Elsubbaugh *et al.*, 2004) that responds to the requirements of the seemingly dramatic transition, this necessitates looking up to knowledge resilience.

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Presently, academics work from their homes, presenting their lectures through different screens and different means of communication to large segments of students, carrying out their research, searching for funding opportunities for their research projects and marking students' assignments and submitting their reports. In addition to the mental burden, the emerging work environment raises questions such as how the relationship now between academics and their workplace looks like? How did academic discourse of knowledge regime changed? What is the future of knowledge infrastructures in universities in the next five years? As the Covid-19 pandemic highlights the stifling nature of our academic work, universities have been forced to reinterpret themselves, their priorities and knowledge infrastructures. Therefore, in our article, we shed light on the Use of Twitter by UK Universities to mark the new shape of knowledge regimes in academia implied by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Managing Knowledge During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

One of the prominent classifications of knowledge is the tacit-explicit (Becerra et al., 2008) where explicit knowledge is knowledge stored in physical storage such as books, computers, etc. and tacit knowledge is situational and stored in practices, routines, and feelings (Chuang et al., 2016). The rapid contemporary developments of technology allowed not only storing but communicating, interpreting and assimilating knowledge through *big data* analytics, virtual reality, augmented reality and robotics (Dragicevic et al., 2019). However, we still have to respond to ongoing calls for a better understanding of socio-materiality of knowledge in this digital medium. The conceptualisation of knowledge and technology may couple meaning and matter together (Nova & González, 2016; Orlikowski, 2007; Paananen, 2020). As during a pandemic, communication is critical for organisations to ensure people are reassured, informed, and engaged, communication can take different shapes and forms. In parallel, maintaining the knowledge continuity and restoring the knowledge accumulation would be essential (Shujahat et al., 2019) but failure factors may also hinder knowledge management initiatives (Larsson et al., 1998) as traditional bureaucratic barriers. Social media platforms may effectively help overcome these failure factors and enable communicating knowledge with subscribers to social media accounts where institutions tend to convey messages of various media and meaning to their stakeholder communities, and keep engaged with what the community thinks of and reacts to performance (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2010).

The socio-materiality of communication is necessarily obvious in this current pandemic due to the radical shift of working patterns i.e. from workplace to home based (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Viewing knowledge as socio-material (Nova & González, 2016; Orlikowski, 2007; Paananen, 2020; Shotter, 2013) should therefore enable us to understand how Universities determine and enact knowledge artefacts to their stakeholders inside and outside of organisational boundaries. In view of the current Covid-19 pandemic developments, the prospective knowledge type that may be essential to Universities' stakeholders is likely to be featured as timely and rapidly dynamic, formalised and explicit as follows:

- Health and wellbeing knowledge in the form of Covid-19 preventative measures and equipment, mental health and personal wellbeing.
- Higher education teaching and assessment adapted processes such as virtual online teaching and assessment.

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