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# Could Twitter Destroy Hollywood's Marketing Magic?

**Dumenco's Trendrr Chart of the Week**

by [Simon Dumenco](#)  
Published: [August 21, 2009](#)



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**Top 5 Grossing Summer Movies 2009 (Number of Matching Twitter Posts per Day)**

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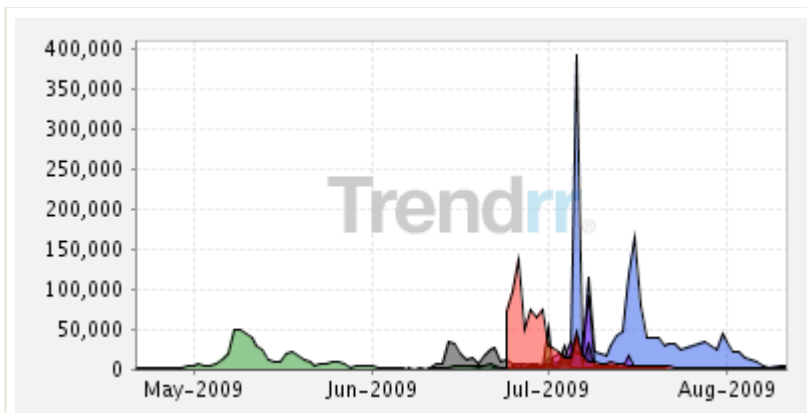


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**Key:** [transformers](#) (source: Number of Matching Twitter Posts per Day)  
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["ice age"](#) (source: Number of Matching Twitter Posts per Day)  
["harry potter"](#) (source: Number of Matching Twitter Posts per Day)

Did you see Michael Sragow's article ["Twitter Effect rattles Hollywood"](#) in the Baltimore Sun? Sragow's thesis is neatly laid out in the first paragraph: "Although word of mouth could always make or break a movie, it usually took days to affect the box office. But the rise of social networking tools such as Twitter might be narrowing that time frame to hours. And that has Hollywood on edge."



Harry Potterheads went way overboard in tweeting this summer; they're simply gratuitous in their tweetage!

Now keep in mind that, as Sragow goes on to note, "Movietickets.com recently ran a home-page poll in which 88% of the voting sample said Twitter had no effect on them." Of course, that means that a little more than 1 in 10 polled moviegoers are using Twitter as

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something of a movie recommendation -- or non-recommendation -- engine; pretty remarkable when you consider how new and nichey Twitter still is. And that *should* have Hollywood on edge. Because what if real-time commenter culture -- Twittering and Facebook updating and etc. -- ends up almost instantaneously neutralizing the ability of a studio's multimillion-dollar marketing blitz to get moviegoers to keep going to see a crummy movie in the early days of release? Anyway, in keeping with this line of inquiry, this week's Trendrr Chart of the Week takes a look at the Twitter buzz surrounding the five top-grossing movies of the summer. A few observations:

- Interestingly, the Twitter peaks correlate with where each movie stands in regard to gross.
- That said, Harry Potterheads went way overboard in tweeting this summer; they're simply gratuitous in their tweetage! If you look at the peak day of tweeting about "Transformers" (137,985 tweets on Friday, June 26) it pales in comparison to tweeting about the boy wizard (391,805 tweets on Monday, July 6), but "Transformers" is right up there with "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" in total worldwide earnings.
- Mark my words: Some day soon somebody's going to get a Ph.D. in the statistical parsing of Twitter data streams -- high-concept stuff far beyond the purview of the humble Trendrr Chart of the Week. Because when you think about it, there are so many angles you can take in approaching the raw information contained in tweets. I'd like to see, for example, data modeling that dives deep into cloud maps of the words -- negative and positive -- most often juxtaposed with mentions of movies. Then studios would *really* know exactly what they're up against.

~ ~ ~

**Dumenco's Trendrr Chart of the Week** is produced in collaboration with [Wiredset](#), the New York digital agency behind [Trendrr](#), a social- and digital-media tracking service. More background [here](#). A basic Trendrr account is free; Trendrr Pro, which offers more robust tracking and reporting tools, comes in various paid flavors (get the details [here](#)).

Simon Dumenco is the "Media Guy" media columnist for Advertising Age. You can follow him on Twitter [@simondumenco](#).

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By alexqgb | Orinda, CA [August 21, 2009 02:25:34 pm](#): 

The best point here is that you're seeing the limits of a business model that exploits the delta between the dropping of a stink bomb, and the widespread realization that the bomb, in fact, stinks.

That should be seen as a 100% positive thing for (a) audiences in general (b) theaters who are getting increasingly screwed by short-run films that hand 90% of opening grosses to studios, then tank long before the rev. splits tilt in favor of screen owners and (c) all the highly creative professionals who are competing against their own studio's temptation for fast wins from derivative content.

In short, the Twitter effect is not going to destroy Hollywood. Yes, it threatens the kinds of hack executives who are a general discredit to the business, but let's be clear - this is a GOOD thing for *\*everybody\** else.

Also, that 88% number is absurd. In truth, you have no way of knowing whether or not the Twitter effect is influencing you, unless you habitually ask the source of any personal recommendation where they got their information from, and where, in turn, that source got its information from.

Since the whole point of having trusted friends is *\*not\** having to do this kind of due diligence when making purchase decisions, so in reality very few people can accurately account for the extent of Twitter's influence.

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By Rodney33 | FRISCO, TX [August 21, 2009 02:31:11 pm](#):

It's not the total Tweets that count. It's the macro message; "Harry Potter Rocks!" or "I hate movie X."

Why? Because either could become a top topic trend. When that happens, it appears as a "most discussed topic" and people click on to see what the fuss is about.

Don't believe me? Ask P. Diddy.

For a few weeks earlier this year there was a negative Tweet campaign against him, because some people felt he was over Tweeting and promoting himself. A few folks even created Twitter personas with names that reflected their disdain for his

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GI Joe had mixed Tweets. A lot of, "I'm excited to see it," met with, "I just saw it and it sucked!" all on Friday morning of the opening weekend.

The film opened with a \$54 million domestic box office weekend, well below the \$70 million studio forecast. I made note in Ad Age commentary on opening day, things didn't look so good on Twitter for GI Joe.

The film reportedly cost \$175 million to produce and 10's of millions more to promote.

It still stands a chance to make money both domestically and internationally. But the studio is not making the money they had anticipated domestically.

All that said, here's where things get a little scary for Hollywood with Twitter, Facebook and social networking in general.

Over 75% of people Tweet from their phone vs. computer. So instant reviews can take place even before walking out of a theater.

If there are enough negative Tweets to make the top 10 topic list, all of sudden, you've got a message that people can read as late as while they're buying their movie tickets, even early on opening day.

We found in a special study we're releasing in a few weeks titled XL Marketing Trends, the most popular (users favorite, not necessarily most used) phone App in use is Facebook.

People who use Twitter also use Facebook. Twitter is just easier for quick messages. But you have to assume, if they are Tweeting about a movie, they or some of the people they are Tweeting, are also making posts on Facebook, which has almost six times the users as Twitter.

Once you have a consistent message across both footprints, you have to assume, especially with the Gen Y audience, you're going to feel the negative or positive effects.

Rodney Mason, CMO  
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By hgoldfarb67 | Los Angeles, CA [August 21, 2009 02:34:40 pm](#):

Twitter as with all social media does give people the ability to 'search' and see what people are saying. But they can also see reviews in the news etc. But I wouldn't worry about broadcast tweets. Anyone who is a heavy twitter user I am sure reads less than 10% of tweets they receive. The volume is just too much if your following 200 people. I follow 26 people and already have more than I can manage. On Facebook I only see the front page of updates so if it doesn't make the front page I don't see it (just like twitter since I use my laptop not a mobile device).

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By jeremychaput | Toronto, ON [August 21, 2009 03:28:53 pm](#):

If you run movies like "District 9", "Bruno" or "Harry Potter" on <http://www.tweetfeel.com> you'll get a great idea of people's feelings towards these movies.

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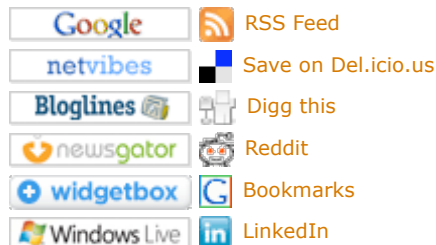
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