Impact of a Brand Crisis on Nation Branding: An Analysis of Tweets about VW's Emissions Crisis

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The Volkswagen Group's intentional deception of the EPA's emissions tests and violation of the Clean Air Act spurred an international conversation on social media about the company's transgressions. As a consequence of Germany's nation brand relying heavily on its exports, the "Made in Germany" label has the potential to be undermined by the crisis.

Research Questions

1. To what extent did Twitter users connect the VW scandal to the German reputation, brand, economy, or political structure?

2. What were the most popular themes of the tweets that related to the German reputation, brand, economy, or political structure? Are these themes significantly different based on location? Are these themes significantly different based on type of Twitter user (media, journalist, corporate, professional, or regular user)?

3. What type of Twitter users (media, journalist, corporate, professional, or regular user) are most likely to be the conversation starters, the most engaged, and the most central users in the network?

Method

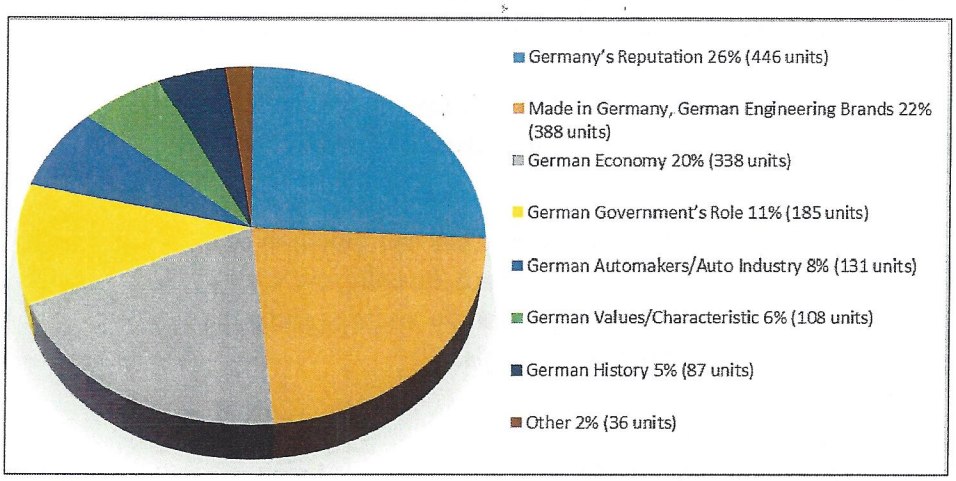
- Historical data grant from **Texifter** provided access to more than 200,000 tweets and enterprise access to **DiscoverText**, a "cloud-based, collaborative text analytics solution."
- Tweets selected based on the criteria of inclusion of the hashtags #VW, #VWGate, #DieselGate, #VWscandal or #Volkswagenscandal and use of the English language during the period of September 22-October 1, 2012. The final sample included 110,882 Tweets.

Results

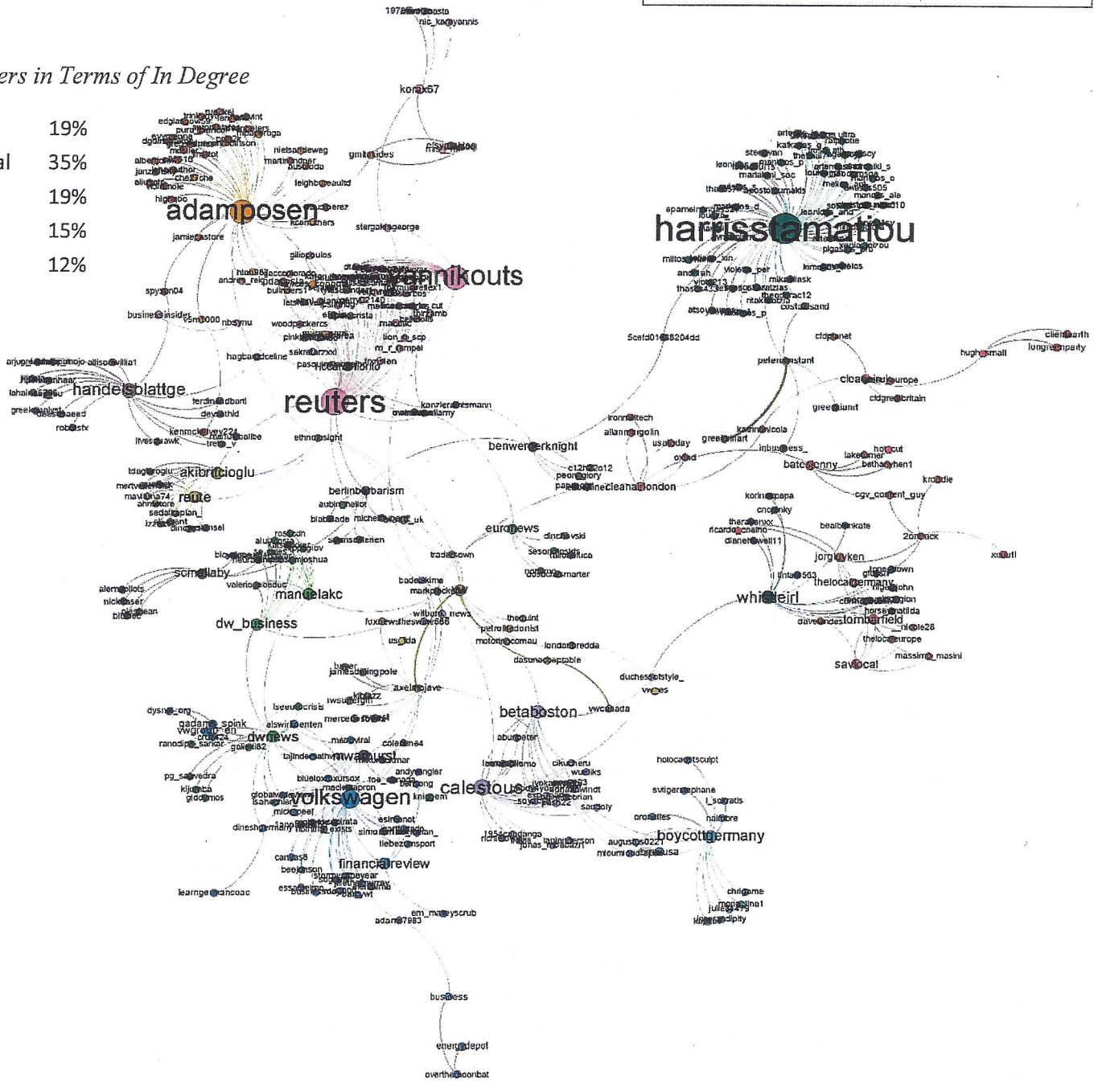
Prevalence of the German reputation

Of the 110,882 English tweets from the September 22-October 1, 2012 time period that used the hashtags #VW, #DieselGate, #VWGate, #volkswagenscandal, and #VWscandal, 5,065 included the words "Germany" or "German" in the text of the tweet. These tweets were reviewed to filter tweets for analysis that referenced the impact of the scandal on reputation of Germany or the German auto industry as well as tweets that referenced the impact on the German economy or political involvement, resulting in 1,711 tweets. Tweets with the keywords of German or Germany that were removed from the sample usually referenced the German/Germany keywords as adjectives for media, ministers, etc

Themes



Most Retweeted

Twitter Users in Terms of In Degree

Journalist	19%
Professional	35%
Media	19%
Company	15%
Other	12%