

Introduction

- Scholars have become increasingly interested in the role of purpose in optimal well-being (i.e., human thriving) (Bronk, 2013; Duggan, 2015; Hill & Burrow, 2012).
- Purpose represents a transcendent character strength (Seligman & Peterson, 2004), consisting of (Bronk, 2013; Damon, 2008; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003):
 - A long term goal that shapes immediate plans
 - Is personally meaningful
 - Motivated by a desire to make a difference in the world
- Having a purpose is rare.
- Scholars and practitioners are increasingly interested in fostering purpose.
- Interventions work best when there is a fit between participants' interests and intervention activities (Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Aim & Rationale

- To better understand how lay people think about purpose.
 - Inform future interventions.
- To gauge people's general level of interest in the construct of purpose in life.

Research Questions

1. How frequently do people post about purpose on leading social media sites? How does this compare to other character strengths and virtues?
2. Have social media references to purpose, similar to scholarly references to the construct (Bronk, 2013), increased in recent years?
3. What do people say about purpose in their social media posts?

Methods

Tools

- Social media analytics software package: **Crimson Hexagon**.
 - Creates monitors (queries) based on keywords.

Participants

- English speaking countries around the world.
- Countries: 47% United States, 15% United Kingdom, 4% India, 3% Indonesia, 3% Philippines, 3% Canada, 2% Australia, and 20% from 132 other countries.
- Facebook users 42% female. Twitter users were 48% female.

Procedure

- RQ #1 (frequency of purpose posts):
 - Public Twitter and Facebook posts during (1/1/2016 - 6/30/2016).
 - Monitored character strengths and virtues to provide context for the prevalence of purpose (see Figure 1).

- RQ #2 (change in number of posts):
 - Used the purpose keywords created for RQ #1.
 - To control for the increase in the number of users over time

$$\frac{\text{average \# of posts} \div \text{quarter}}{\text{\# of active users} \div \text{quarter}}$$

- Crimson Hexagon collected this data consistently from:
 - Facebook: Q2 2013 - Q2 2016. Twitter: Q1 2010 - Q2 2016 (see Figure 2).

- RQ #3 (Content analysis of 10,000 posts):
 - The two coders independently reviewed batches of 100 posts collected in RQ #1 and met to compare their results. They utilized a constant comparative approach (Glaser, 1965) to further edit categories and sub-categories to best fit the data.
 - Posts were not restricted to one sub-category (e.g. "Making people laugh is my purpose in life" was categorized into both the "presence of purpose" and "contribution-focused"). (See Table 1).

Results

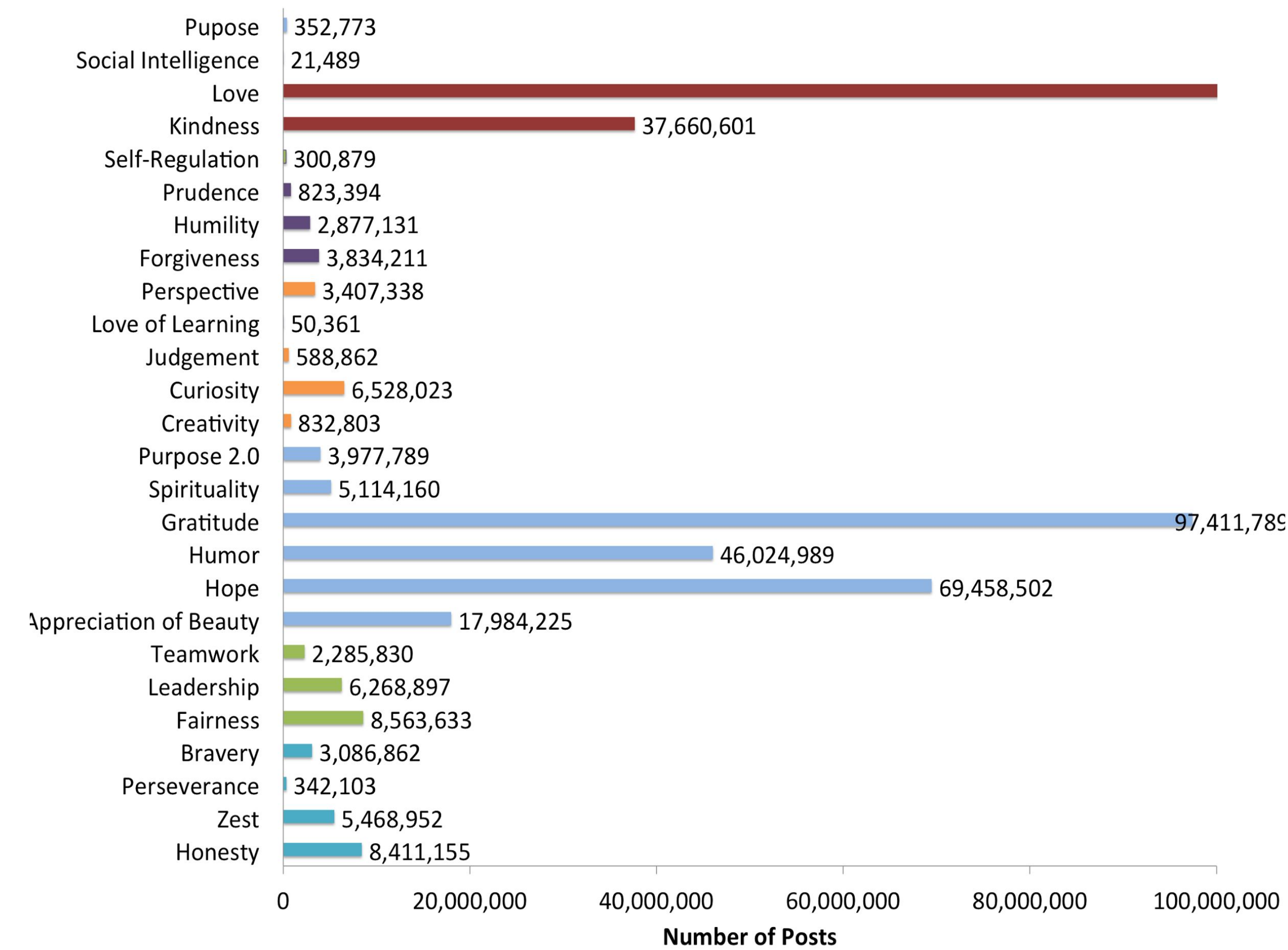


Figure 1. The number of posts for each character strength and purpose monitor

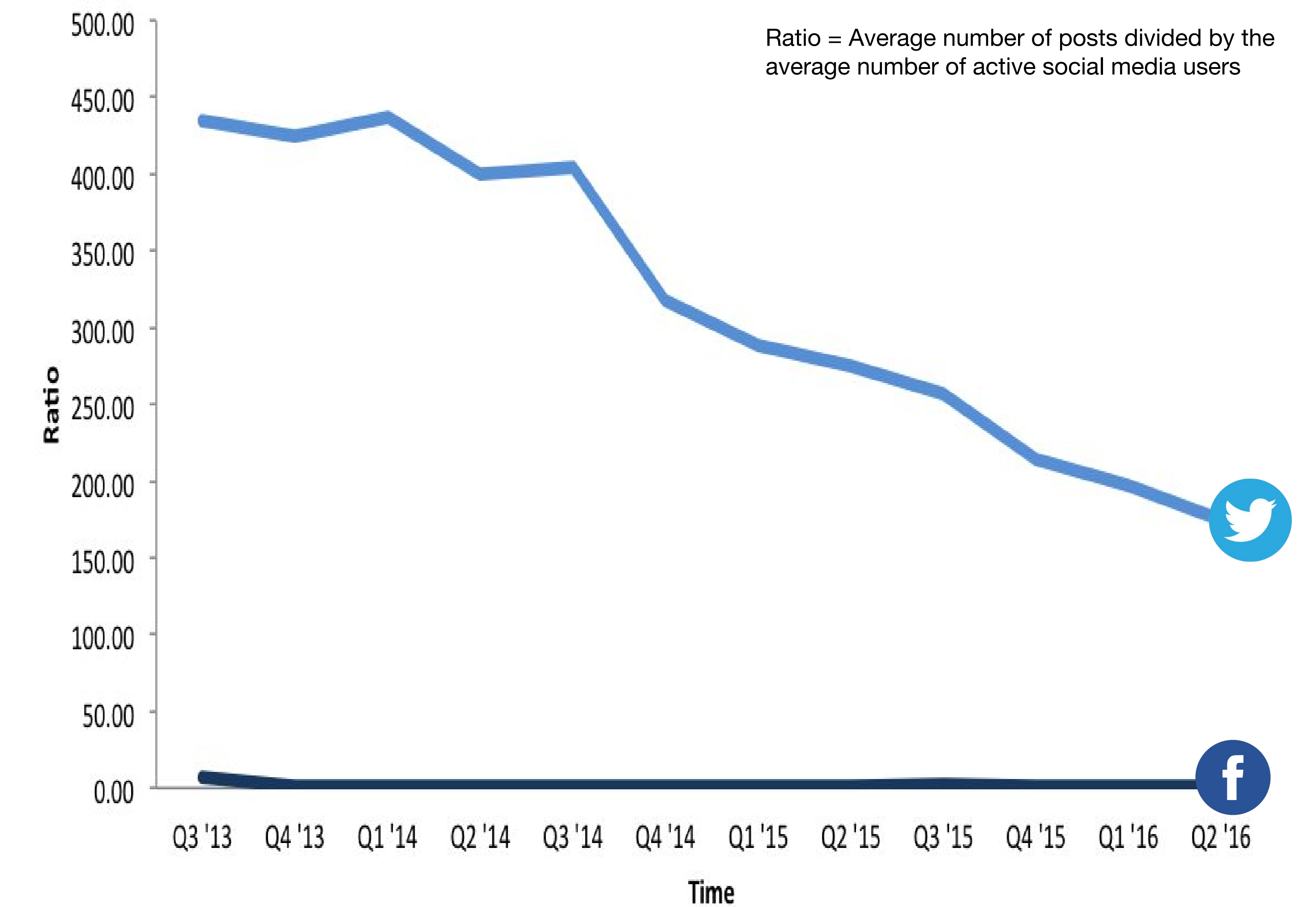


Figure 2. The ratio of posts about purpose from Q3 2013 to Q2 2016

Purpose Status	Presence of Purpose	"Grilled cheese with bacon is the meaning of life."
	Search for Purpose	"Why do I constantly look for meaning in life? I don't know..."
	Lack of Purpose	"We have no actual purpose in life so what is the point of ever being upset or stressed about anything just do what you wanna do n be happy"
Purpose Form	Self-Actualization	"Achievement is largely the product of steadily raising one's level of aspiration and expectation."
	Contribution-Focused	"& if at the end my only purpose in life was to love people then let it be. The world needs love."
	Religious Purpose	"Success is being where God wants you to be, doing what God wants you to do. Remember the importance of linking habits to your life purpose."
	Relational Purpose	"purpose of life is to be with the person u love most and to die with them. I love youu"
	Career Purpose	"All this work, no vocation."
	Political or Patriotic	"If Afzal is innocent & not guilty, then why they say your aspiration will be fulfilled. What was his aspiration? Destroy India?"
	Hobby or Leisure	"The day they cancel SVU is the day I lose all purpose in my life."
	Artistic Purpose	"so I'm here with my grandparents and you can really tell they're getting old, so I'm gonna show them the meaning in life. Good music."
Reflections on Purpose	Purpose Quotations	"The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better. - Robert F. Kennedy."
	Personal Reflections	"Winners are people with definite purpose in life."
Other	Not Related	"Monty Python's the meaning of life"; "Ergonomic accessories that aspiration avoid hagiology again plain: Vs"

Table 1. Content of purpose related posts from Facebook and Twitter

Discussion

- These findings can help researchers and practitioners interested in fostering purpose. They also shed light on the nature and level of interest lay people have in the important topic of purpose in life.
- Posts referencing purpose appear to be decreasing as scholarly interest in the topic increases (Bronk, 2013; Duggan, 2015). This study was exploratory and requires additional study to verify this online trend.
- Examining the content of posts revealed that people write frequently about contribution, religious and spiritual aims, and other transcendent goals; however, when discussing issues beyond-the-self, they are more likely to quote others than use their own words.

- However, users may lack the language for discussing beyond-the-self purposes in life.
- Posting about one's purpose in the 'grand scheme' may be easier to express online than to express a personal purpose.

Limitations

- Exploratory keywords used may not be as optimized as possible.
- Limited to only public posts.
- Historical online trends added noise to these keywords