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The Twitter Effect

1) Early 2000's: Before social media, there were mainly either private conversational media or public broadcasting media (Miller et al., 2016). "As social network sites evolved and the social graph became the basis for information access, social media emerged as the new paradigm for connecting to information, people, and ideas" (Boyd, 2015, p. 2). She also describes Friendster, MySpace and Facebook as "networked publics" that had 4 affordances: persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability (Boyd, 2014, as cited in Miller et al., 2016).

2) 2006: The inception of Twitter: As explained by founder Jack Dorsey, Twitter was created as "part of a long line of squawk media, dispatch, short messaging, as well as citizen communication services" (Rogers, 2014, p. 10). It was established in 2006 as a way for friends to stay connected through public status updates. It is a distinctive information and social network that includes differentiating features including its 'follower' structure, link sharing with hashtags and search functions (Gleason, 2015).

3) Smartphones take over: Based on data from 2008 to 2018, the rise of social media use in the US was driven almost entirely by time spent on smartphones and tablets (Ortiz-Espina, 2019). "Mobile browsers frequently support microblogging. Participation via mobile phone or tablet makes microblogging a social practice that can occur anytime, anywhere, by anybody" (Mills & Chandra, 2011, p. 42).

4) Cultural shift: The hashtag is a useful multi-purpose tool that is typically used for grouping conversations in themes. It serves as a "marker to guide the reader to the presence of new, relevant, or unexpected information" (Gleason, 2015, p. 39). Hashtags have been used to disseminate information during major news events or have served as a discourse marker to meaningful experiences including identity expression, participation in Twitter memes, use of humor, and sharing relevant information (Gleason, 2015).

5) Writing makeover: Originally, tweets were confined to 140 characters corresponding to the character limit on SMS mobile phones but was changed to 280 characters in 2017 (Spangler, 2022). As stated earlier, the rise in smartphone use proliferated microblogging habits.

6) Reading habits: Short 140-280 character sound bytes promote rapid consumption of more content but with less depth, ideal for the unfocused individual (Guo, 2023).

7) Digital literacy training: Despite students' access and massive use of media, they are not necessarily equipped with media literacy skills that can help them to effectively analyze, understand and evaluate new forms of information in order to make smart decisions about its quality and uses (Gammon & White, 2011). Twitter use also requires familiarity with multimodal literacies (Gleason, 2015).

8) <u>Global awareness</u>: Since Twitter transcends the reach of local and national interests, students need to develop skills to "evaluate media from different countries, cultures and perspectives" (Gammon & White, 2011, p. 342).

9) <u>Information and media literacy</u>: Gammon & White (2011) opine that students need to be attentive, accountable, and responsible for what they create and share online. Media literacy maturity "calls on students to determine appropriate responses to material they may decide is questionable, reliable, and authentic or inauthentic" (Gammon & White, 2011, p. 341). In our information-saturated world, students must be equipped with the tools to research, fact-check and discern content (Gammon & White, 2011).

10) <u>Education implications</u>: "Twitter is increasingly used as a source of real-time information and a place for debate in news, politics, business, and entertainment" (Weller et al., 2014, p. 30). Social media has become the contemporary marketplace of ideas where knowledge is gained as opposed to traditional forms of learning. This in part is due to the role of "emotion, or feeling, in supporting engagement with literate practice" (Gleason, 2015 p. 50).

11) <u>English language evolution</u>: The use of social media has led to updates in the English language that has become part of our daily vernacular. Words such as "selfie" and even the tears of joy emoji made it into the Oxford "word" of the year in 2013 and 2015 respectively (Davies, 2016).

12) <u>The future of Twitter, X</u>: Artistic license was given based on the prevalence of citizen journalists on X as well as their reputation for free speech. The tangled chords represent the challenges to sorting through the truth due to fake news and unvetted sources, whereas disconnected chords represent the inability to report truth due to heavy censorship and politics. On a side note, I think Twitter/X is important for archiving our contemporary culture and history.

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