

Describing Communication Technologies

ETC 540

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In a world where change is constant and the demand for speed and efficiency often drives progress, traditional methods of communication often struggle to keep pace. This leads to the emergence of new technologies and practices that can effectively address the evolving needs of its users. Twitter emerging as a groundbreaking social media tool encapsulates this shift. With its 280-character limit, this microblogging platform met the demand for rapid, concise, and global communication. In turn, Twitter has also configured the user as we change the way we communicate to fit the tool. This paper examines how Twitter, as a representative example of social media, has impacted literacy and education.

Twitter was born in 2006 as a simple messaging platform, and has developed into one of the most prominent social media platforms in the world today. Twitter allows for users to publish ideas in real-time by writing 'tweets' and posting them for the world and/or your followers to see. These posts are limited to 280 characters and can include features like hashtags that connect them to other users. There are also features such as following and replying that further build online networks. With estimations of one billion monthly visitors, the majority being young users, Twitter allows for infinite amounts of information to be disseminated at an unbelievably efficient rate (Malik et al., 2019).

Like many digital technologies, Twitter allows for infinite access to information with a simple click. Real-time posts grant access to global news, diverse perspectives, and engage users in public discourse. Twitter aligns with users' busy lives and desire for digestible content accessible from their compact portable phones. Post lengths are constrained, encouraging precise and efficient writing. In fact, "the definition of twitter is a short burst of inconsequential information and chirps from birds, which describes the purpose of social networking on Twitter -- to share short and quick information" (*What Is Twitter?*, n.d.). This impacts users by ultimately changing the way they create and consume information (Malik et al., 2019). For instance, choosing words carefully to fit the character limit can promote filtering key ideas and communicating efficiently. However there is also a risk these tweets can over simplify complex ideas and promote clickbait or dramatic posts rather than deep understanding and research.

Because of these character limits, users have adapted language by using slang, abbreviations, and hashtags. This influences users' writing styles and literacy as these platforms often create their own unique language while ignoring conventional language rules. Words like 'LOL' and 'BRB' are now seeping out of the online world and into our everyday verbal language (Jebaselvi et al., 2023). Additionally, users have implored creativity in order to get their message across effectively. A specific example of this is the use of memes on Twitter posts to convey a more complex message through visuals. Yet another form of literacy that is utilized on this forum.

Mememes combine images with text to express ideas or emotions in a way that can be quickly understood. This visual literacy requires users to interpret and create meaning from both text and graphics. The use of mememes demonstrates how digital communication evolves beyond traditional text, blending multiple forms of media to engage users effectively (Jebaselvi et al., 2023). These mememes can go viral across the expansive digital network shifting language across communities, languages, and cultural barriers.

A current example of a digital viral sensation in my highschool, and most in North America, that has changed language, is the origin of the word “skibidi”. Beginning as a song, it gained huge popularity through a viral video on Tik Tok. It then exploded and was seen in countless mememes and videos. Although this word technically started without any meaning it eventually became so popular and commonly used that it came to mean “bad” or “cool” depending on the context. There are numerous other words and phrases in my school alone that have undergone this same cycle of evolving from meaningless to widely recognized language. This example highlights how social media platforms like Twitter contribute effectively to the rapid evolution of language and cultural trends.

Hashtags are another digital tool on Twitter that is closely linked to language creation, expression, and organization. These help organize content, making it easier for users to find information related to specific topics. By tagging content with keywords, hashtags streamline the process of locating and following discussions on various subjects. They also influence the language used in posts, as users may adapt their messages to align with trending hashtags or popular themes. “On social media sites like Twitter and Instagram, hashtag usage not only aided in content discovery but also helped to establish language trends” (Jebaselvi et al., 2023). This often leads to the creation and spread of new slang or abbreviations, contributing to the evolution of language. For example, #FOMO or fear of missing out reflects anxiety or concern about missing out on exciting events that others are experiencing. By sharing this hashtag people can connect in this shared feeling, promoting people to engage and participate in what is considered trending. Once the trend is happening, it reinforces more people to fit in and participate, ultimately impacting how we engage, what we post, and with who. FOMO is now a mainstream word used by many on digital platforms but also in casual conversation face to face.

As mentioned previously, Twitter impacts traditional literacy in many ways through altering methods of writing and reading. However, it has also impacted education by enhancing digital literacy in many ways. “Even though social media platforms were not designed with the explicit purpose of supporting educational and other learning-related activities, their affordance for networking and content sharing have made them a natural fit for those purposes” (Tess, 2013). Twitter can expose learners to diverse information sources and encourage critical thinking as users have to evaluate and interpret different viewpoints. It has also proven useful for resource and information sharing, offering advantages that traditional classroom methods often lack. The platform’s real-time updates facilitate immediate communication, enabling educators to share new materials and insights quickly. Educators are incorporating Twitter into classrooms for discussions, assignments, and networking, improving student engagement and collaborative learning (Malik et al., 2019).

While social media platforms such as Twitter have significantly impacted literacy and education, it is crucial to consider challenges to its use. Although the platform meets a demand for

rapid and expansive dissemination of information, it makes it susceptible to misinformation and echo chambers (*Echo Chamber and Polarization in Social Media*, n.d.). Users are exposed primarily to viewpoints that reinforce their own beliefs. This presents challenges for users trying to critically evaluate content. In an educational context, Twitter's integration into classrooms brings its own set of challenges, including concerns about inappropriate use and privacy issues (Malik et al., 2019). While the platform facilitates real-time communication and resource sharing, it also requires careful management to prevent misuse. Educators must be aware of these challenges to ensure Twitter serves as a beneficial tool for enhancing learning effectively.

Twitter's impact on literacy and education highlights the dynamic nature of communication in the digital age. As social media grows and Twitter continues to operate as a major platform, it has shaped traditional literacy practices encouraging rapid and expansive communication. However, it is important to note both its influence and areas of caution. The platform's susceptibility to misinformation and echo chambers are a reality that users need to be able to identify and navigate. Overall, while Twitter and similar social media offer valuable tools for enhancing and changing literacy and education as we know it, it is essential to understand these challenges to fully realize its benefits.

References

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