Life in the Twittersphere

Noob Tweets Re: Twittersphere – Between Info-Brokerage and House of Prayer



TedTurnau, April 10, 2009

About two weeks ago, I began to use the micro-blogging social network site called “Twitter.” The idea is simple: let a select group of users know what you are doing and thinking in short, public messages in real time. These posts are called “tweets.” You can also message people privately if they are in your group. To give you a feel for it, I’ve decided to write this entire article using only messages less than 140 characters long. Of course, on a real Twitter page, you’d be reading my tweets from the bottom of the page to the top, so it’s a bit of a compromise. I’ll start doing it . . . now:

Twitter’s rise is meteoric. Btw 2/08-2/09, US use grew 1382%, 1689% in UK.[1]

Still smaller than Facebook, Twitter is catching up. By 2010 it could have 50+ mil users or more.[2]

Twitter’s attraction? Hyper-connectivity: that feeling of intimacy, community and immediacy. Listen to other’s thoughts in real time.

Micro-blogging is an easy target, but it’s not as ridiculous as it first appears.

Twitter has been extremely useful in crisis situations. Got Cal-Berkeley student and translator out of Egyptian jail.[3]

Helped coordinate relief and give real-time updates during Mumbai bombings. Wked so well govt asked them 2 stop bc terrorist might Twitter.[4]

People have used Twitter to find biz contacts, friends, jobs, customer support, etc.

Twitter’s been helpful 2 me personally. Connected w/a friend in States who’d lost her best friend in car accident.

W/o Twitter, I wouldn’t have known and couldn’t have encouraged or prayed for her.

Coolest feature: the Everyone tab. Click on it and you get tweets from random people all over the world who posted just then.

Gives weird feeling of mixed omniscience + intimacy w/ strangers, like angels in Wim Wender's Der Himmel über Berlin (Wings of Desire).

It gives the impression that they aren't really strangers, but rather potential friends waiting to be discovered.

Net effect (pun alert): Twitter lowers social barriers, and so works to fulfill human need for community, for contact, for being heard.

Prob w/ease of soc. access: relationships are 2 easy. U don't have 2 spend time cultivating 'em. Instant relationship not nec a good thing.

Real friends require face2face conversations, shared meals, glasses of wine, cups of coffee. Tweeting can thin the quality of relationships.

Plus, keeping conversations to 140 character byte-sized chunks does weird things to communication, as u can see. Squooshes it.

Some have satirized the communication style. My two faves . . .

Homer's Odyssey: "Circe is hot. All my bros turned into pigs. LULZ!"[5]

Shakespeare: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Nah."[6]

Graver danger: *narcissism.* Everything geared to answering one question: "What are you doing?" Company motto.[7] Self-display encouraged.

Twitter culture, or the "Twittersphere," is geared towards trying to get more "followers"=people who read self-display thru your tweets.

U do this by offering "value" in ur tweets, e.g. tech. info, news stories, wisdom n wit, humor, helpful links, etc.

Do it well and watch ur numbers soar. I don't do it well. I'm a noob.

The people who do it best are called "Twitterati," the power-user lords of Twitter, like iJustine, Scobleizer, and garyvee.

Others not so worried re: numbers. Just want to connect, be heard, like prayer. Want 2 know some1 cares about the details of their lives.

Most fall somewhere between the 2 groups: prayer + value-added exchange.

Prob. is that u come to see followers as a reflection of self-worth. Boost in numbers=ego boost. Fall in numbers=ego hit.

Everybody on Twitter feels a little like a mini-celebrity. This is not a good thing.

Celebrity and instant friendship do weird things to self-image/psyche/spirit. It gives a buzz.

Putting self on display comes 2 feel like an obligation: I owe it to the tweeple.

But why shud I compare myself w/"Socks the Cat." He's got 300k+ followers (including me). I've only got 14.

Feels like I'm striving for the wrong target. Must . . . resist . . .

Is it a consumer-oriented marketing culture gone to seed? Is it sharing with a caring community? Maybe both?

Whatever it is, it feeds the need for affirmation and draws me in for more. Must be vry careful.

1 thing that helps is 2 remember: Good Friday + Easter means I've got more than enough affirmation.

One of the side-effects of the gospel: the worthless declared worthy in God's sight. I've been adopted into an awesome network.

Twitter "prayer" focuses on self-display. Real prayer focuses on God. Narcissism vs. trust. No contest.

Massive affirmation in Christ (some1 cares about details of my life) means I can affirm others who are lonely. Sharing out of fullness.

1 Pet. 2:9-10, 2 Cor. 1:3-7: The original intention of social networking. God's glory and mutual comfort/encouragement.

That kind of networking goes on forever. Not limited to 140 characters.

Gospel side-effect #2: a community of screwed-up people like me drawn together, pursuing a single love. Folks to drink a glass of wine with.

If Church were what it's supposed 2 be, it wud be natural for the lonely 2 come in n find peace. Make Twitter obsolete? Less needed, anyway.

Concl: Twitter is interesting, useful, and tempts w/its own idols. Go in with eyes/ears wide open.

Trust God, serve and share self w/others, don't get swallowed by pride and marketing monster.

Puts a whole new spin on being a "follower" of Christ. Thank God Christ follows back.

KTHXBAI!

Notes

[1] See Adam Ostrow, "Twitter Now Growing at a Staggering 1,382%,"at Mashable.com (16 March 2009), available online at [1] (accessed 26 March 2009); and Dan Whitworth, "Twitter Growth Explodes in a Year," BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat website (17 March 2009), available online at [1] (accessed 26 March 2009). Real tweets don't have footnotes. Instead they embed urls into the post. I decided that would clutter things too much. Another compromise.

[2] Nick O'Neill, "Twitter Has a Big Month, Grows to Over 8 Million U.S. Users," Socialtimes.com (6 March 2009), available online at [1] (accessed 26 March 2009).

[3] Mallory Simon, "Student 'Twitters' His Way Out of Egyptian Jail," CNN.com, 25 April, 2008, at [1] (accessed 28 March 2009); and Simon, "Twitter Saga Ends in Jailed Translator Going Free," CNN.com, 10 July, 2008, at [1] (accessed 28 March 2009).

[4] Stephanie Busari, "Tweeting the Terror: How Social Media Reacted to Mumbai," CNN.com, 28 November 2008, at [1] (accessed 28 March 2009).

[5] Eric Alt, "If Homer's Odyssey Was Written on Twitter," on Holy Taco website, at [1] (accessed 10 April 2009).

[6] Anna at abdpbt blog, at [1] (accessed 10 April 2009).

[7] See the Twitter welcome page, [1].

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[1] http://www.turnau.cz/content/life-twittersphere