



The Long Story about the Short Medium

Twitter as a Communication Medium in Historical, Present, and Future Context

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Twitter, the hottest new medium in the social media landscape, has historical roots in such successful short forms as graffiti, telegrams, and book blurbs. The transformation of all consumers of social media into consumer-producers has leveled the political playing field on Twitter, and the entertainment field as well, giving all Tweepers equal ability to converse with famous politicians and celebrities. As a written and multi-medium, Twitter has evolved much like the evolution of all media, starting with writing and pictures, and moving on to sounds and moving images, in the same way that phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny in living organisms. Also like the biological world, Twitter is increasingly interconnected with other online “organisms,” e.g., Facebook and YouTube, moving our world ever closer to a “noosphere” of the Earth as an interconnected consciousness. Further, Twitter and its descendant Foursquare are merging the real and virtual worlds, as GPS components of smart phones can tell anyone online where the user is located. Twitter also has a growing impact on the arts, leading to television sitcoms based on Tweets, novels created on Twitter, and new forms of documentaries made of short interviews. Media survive based on how well they satisfy a natural human need – which means the future of Twitter as a medium looks very promising.

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“Brevity is the soul of wit” –from Shakespeare’s Hamlet –is probably the best assessment in history, brief in itself, of the value of short communication in human life. While no one would mistake the great majority of 140-character communiques from Twitter –“Tweets” –as having much to do with wit, Twitter has become a soul of sorts for politics, entertainment, and a wide range of human activities, trivial and profound.

This essay explores the impact of Twitter as a medium of communications, starting with a placement of the short message in historical context.

1. A Thumbnail History of the Brief Message

Graffiti –plural of the Italian word “graffito,” meaning “little scratch” –is the oldest known form of brief communications, with examples known as long ago as in Ancient Greece and Rome, and today on the sides of train cars, public edifices, and bathroom stalls. The little scratches have a lot in common with Tweets, in that both are public media, potentially viewable by an unlimited number of people. A significant difference between the two, however, is that while graffiti can obviously endure for thousands of years, Tweets are much more ephemeral, with a “shelf life” in most cases not much longer than the spoken word. In terms of Harold Innis’ distinction (1951) between time-binding and space-binding media –or media which primarily send information across time versus media that primarily communicate across space or distance –the graffito on the wall is time-binding, in contrast to the Tweet on the screen which is space-binding. Twitter as digital graffiti is thus only partially applicable.

The telegram, arising with Samuel Morse’s invention of the

telegraph in the first half of the 19th century, is much more like the Tweet, in that the telegram was designed to be sent and received across long distances. Furthermore, since the sender of the telegram was charged per word, there was an incentive to keep the telegram short (the graffito was and is usually short because it is easier and faster to write fewer words in big letters on public walls). And just as a Tweet can be captured and saved if desired for future reference, so could the telegram be stored in a desk drawer. In contrast, although graffiti has survived for millennia, its tenure is in public places, not in the privacy of computer files or file cabinets.

The telegram was the first form of communication that travelled via electricity at the speed of light. Even though the actual delivery of telegrams added some time, usually at least hours, to the process, the impact of this nearly instantaneous communication across vast distances was enormous. Abraham Lincoln communicated with his generals in the US Civil War via telegraph. Shortly after the war was over, Lincoln's assassination was relayed to Europe with the partial help of the telegraph (see Levinson, 1997, for details). Telegrams soon became indispensable for journalism as well as for private communication.

The telegram fell out of use in the 20th century, under the impact of the telephone. As early as 1900, there were 50 phone calls made for every telegram that was sent (Levinson, 1997, p. 51). Significantly, however, the telephone conversation is in most ways unlike the telegram – the phone conversation is verbal rather than written, and is not necessarily short. These factors, wrapped in the package of the sheer power and joy of directly conversing with another person, made the telephone irresistible in comparison to the telegraph. The short written form would need to find other carriers before the introduction of Twitter in 2006.

The blurb –praising a book, a movie, a television show, or a play –is more like a graffito than a telegram, in that blurbs are usually found on the backs of books, in newspaper pages, even on billboards (which have the most in common with graffiti), and other mass media. The blurb may also be the closest to attaining Shakespeare’s “brevity is the soul of wit” –or, at least, aiming to attain that ideal, and this makes the blurb more akin to graffiti, which may also strive for a witticism, than to a telegram or the usual Tweet, which is usually more descriptive than poetic.

Some authors not only may seek blurbs to help commend their books, but may use blurb-size titles for chapters or just stand-alone sentences in their books. Marshall McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” –what he referred to as a “gloss” – would be a well known example (see McLuhan, 1962), utilizing a style also prized by Friedrich Nietzsche, as in, for example, his observation that “the intellect is the error”. But, again, such literary gems have little in common with the great majority of Tweets, which, while intended to inform, entertain, and persuade –the three possible goals of all communication –do so for the most part with little regard for literary style.

2. The Tweet in Politics

In a democratic society, in which leaders and representatives are elected via some kind of voting process, communication to the electorate is of paramount importance. Press releases and press conferences once served this purpose –and still do –but have now been joined and even usurped by Tweets directly from political figures. In all cases –press release, press conference, and Tweet – the goal is to get the information to the attention of mass media,

which can in turn distribute this information to the people. Twitter also, in principle, allows any reader, which means any person, direct access to the politician or government official. In this sense, Twitter is like a press conference, in which the reader/writer on Twitter acts as a reporter asking questions at a press conference.

As I emphasize at length in my 2009 book, *New New Media*, one of the cardinal characteristics – and indeed what I see as the defining characteristics – of the new new media environment is its transformation of consumers (readers, in the case of Twitter) into producers (people who Tweet, and can use these Tweets to ask questions of politicians). Amazon and iTunes, also online, would be examples of old new media, because their content is mainly determined by editorial selection (book publishers and record labels) – although this is beginning to open up, or become more “new,” with the advent of Kindle editions on Amazon, and music getting on to iTunes via Tunecore, CD Baby, and ReverbNation, in which authors and bands can create their own content for sale on Amazon and iTunes. But Twitter has been “new new” from its outset, along with other titans of new new media such as Facebook, YouTube, and blogging in general.

Significantly, such power does not at all level the significant differences between politicians and other people on Twitter who may ask the politicians questions. John McCain, who has an active Twitter account, is still and will always be someone who ran for President of the United States in 2008. Similarly, Sarah Palin – who was McCain’s running mate (Vice Presidential candidate) in 2008, may well run for President in 2012, and continues as a prominent popular culture/political icon – uses Twitter and Facebook to express her views. These inform her 2.5 million “fans” on Facebook and 400,000 “followers” on Twitter (see “Twitter as Written and Multi Medium” below for why these two groups are really the same, one, big group), inflame her detractors, and most

importantly serve as raw material for press coverage. Since most other people on Twitter and Facebook – regardless of their numbers of followers, fans, and “friends” – are unlikely to have their Tweets picked up by the mass media, and therein have their messages brought to the attention of millions of other people, such non-celebrity Twitterers (or “Tweeters”) are clearly a kind of second-class citizen on Twitter, or no different than they were and are in the world of mass media and the public before and absent social media.

Celebrities are of course not confined to politics – as Twitter heavy hitters such as Ashton Kutcher (6 million followers) and Larry King (1.75 million followers) demonstrate. Their Tweets are not quite as likely to be broadcast by the mass media as are Sarah Palin’s, but they are still more likely to generate some media coverage than the output of the typical, publicly anonymous Tweeter.

Neither are all political celebrities on Twitter necessarily currently in office or in possession of institutional political power. Sarah Palin was not elected Vice President, and went on to resign her office as Governor of the state of Alaska. Such freedom from the accountability of any public official can serve to liberate the political celebrity, and make their Tweets more spontaneous, or at least less concerned with creating offense.

Peter Hoekstra’s Tweet in February 2009 – “Moved into green zone by helicopter Iraqi flag now over palace. Headed to new US embassy Appears calmer less chaotic than previous here.” – shows the perils of Twitter for anyone in office (see Levinson, 2009, p. 139, for details). As a member of the US House of Representatives, Hoekstra’s Tweet could have attracted the attention of an assassin team bent on killing Hoekstra and his associates in Iraq. His Tweet was roundly criticized as irresponsible for someone in his position.

3. Twitter in the Courts

Twitter as a new medium of communication has also made an appearance in another branch of the United States governments: the courts. In January 2011, attorneys for celebrity Courtney Love indicated they would be offering what could be called a “Twitter defense” in response to charges that Love defamed fashion designer Dawn Simorangkir in a series of insulting Tweets. The logic is apparently that the frequent use of Twitter unhinges one’s mind. Or, as *The Hollywood Reporter* put it (quoted in Mitchell, 2011), this is “something akin to an insanity defense for social media,” claiming Twitter is something “so appealing and addictive” that it deprived Love of normal human restraints in social discourse.

As of this writing, the case has yet to come to court, but to give the “Twitter defense” a bit of historical context, it seems akin to the “TV defense” offered by Ronald Zamora’s attorneys in 1977, who said their client, age 15, murdered an 83-year-old woman (his neighbor) under the baneful influence of television viewing. Unsurprisingly, this defense was found wanting, and Zamora was convicted (Clarke, 2003, p. 125).

The “Twitter defense” for Courtney Love is likely to have the same results –which is not to say that Love will or should be found guilty of the defamation charges, but rather that the defense that “Twitter made me do it” is not likely to be sustained by any jury or judge. Instead, her guilt or lack of guilt should be determined by the same standards brought to bear in any libel or slander case: did the accused publish information known by her to be damaging, and which was in demonstrable fact monetarily or otherwise damaging to the complainant? Or, as I told the *Postmedia News* agency (Levinson quoted by Harris, 2011) in Canada, “Nothing that’s disseminated through social media should be dismissed simply

because it's not in print newspapers."

The larger point here is that although Twitter is remarkably different from traditional mass media – given the ease with which just about anyone can publish Tweets to the world – it also bears significant similarities to all media that came before regarding its possible role as a vehicle of defamation. In Courtney Love's case, this amounts to what was in the mind of the writer at the time of the writing – what were the writer's intentions – and what impact did the writing actually have.

4. Twitter as Written and Multi Medium, and Biological Organism

Consideration of the similarities and differences between Twitter and other media brings to light an interesting and unique characteristic of Twitter: its evolution is an example of what biologists call "phylogeny recapitulating ontogeny", or the development of one organism (medium) replaying the evolution of life (all prior media) on this planet. Twitter began as a written medium, next offered photographic possibilities, and in 2011 is seamlessly woven into the audio-visual clips of YouTube. Similarly, writing was the first medium created by humanity (speech was earlier, but as far as we know came along with the human genome). The written word continued as the first and only mass medium with print in the Renaissance. In the 19th century, photography arose, and in the 20th century, the audio-visual media of motion pictures and then television began to play major roles in our lives and culture.

In the case of Twitter, the interconnectivity of social media – in current parlance, "apps" that connect one social medium to

another – is what makes Twitter’s flowering into a multi-medium possible. One can upload a photo from a camera or any source to “Twitpic,” and if interconnectivity between Twitpic and Twitter has been authorized by the user, the uploaded photograph can be Tweeted to the world at large with a caption and a link to the photo on Twitpic. Further, anyone who accesses Twitter via any device can see the photo on his or her Twitter page.

The connection to YouTube is not quite so transparent (a technical term meaning “easy” or “effortless”) but the result is the same. Further, not only anyone who uploads a video to YouTube, but anyone who “Likes” or “Favorites” a video (two distinct actions) on YouTube can elect to have a note about that action Tweeted. And, just as with the photograph from Twitpic, any video from YouTube that appears in a Tweet can be seen right next to the Tweet on Twitter.

But just as the word, whether written or spoken, continues as the indispensable medium in all mass and interpersonal media (newspapers, books, movies, radio, television, the Internet – and even most photographs have captions), so the written word, the original medium of Twitter, continues as its cornerstone medium. And the interconnectivity of Twitter to photographic and audio-visual media also extends to other text-predominant media – where the written word is king – and therein magnifies the power both of anything written on Twitter (which can instantly be relayed to other media) and anything written on another textual medium (which can instantly be relayed to Twitter).

Twitter and Facebook represent the epitome of this symbiotic textual relationship at present. By a simple act of linking or authorizing exchange of data, which can be initiated either on Twitter or Facebook, a user with accounts on both systems can relay any post on one system to the other and vice versa. A “status update” on Facebook can appear instantly as a Tweet, and a Tweet

can appear instantly as a status update on Facebook. And all of these relayed posts carry the same linking and multi-media possibilities as a Tweet that is just on Twitter. We might reasonably say we are witnessing and experiencing the emergence of a new, unified system –FaceTweet, TwitterFace, or whatever name you give it.

To continue the biological analogy: the interconnectivity of Twitter and Facebook, and both to the rest of the Internet, including photographs and videos, is but the latest and most advanced emergence of the Earth as one living, interconnected organism. This was foreseen by thinkers as diverse as Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose character Clifford in Hawthorne’s 1851 novel *House of the Seven Gables* observes that the telegraph is turning the Earth into one, tingling brain, and by Teilhard de Chardin’s (1955/1959) view of the future Earth as a “noosphere” with a unified, interconnected consciousness.

Indeed, we could consider each link in a Tweet—each gateway to the vast online world beyond Twitter—to be a thread of digital DNA. Just as DNA in appropriate environments can command proteins to form living organisms of all kinds, shapes, and sizes, which taken together comprise our biosphere, so do the links in Tweets allow us to create our own online worlds and tap into the worlds, large and small, created by a myriad of others. The aggregate of all of these worlds is the best approximation of Teilhard’s noosphere we have thus far seen.

5. Smartphones as Servants to Twitter

Consideration of the Earth as a unified, intelligent organism calls attention to the ways that people can access Twitter, and all it

connects to, from an increasing number of places on this planet – and off – approaching a situation in which we can access Twitter not only whenever we may want to, but wherever we may be. Smartphones – iPhones, Blackberrys, Android phones, more – are the current vehicles via which we approach making place, or where we may happen to be, irrelevant to our conducting our work and our fun on the Web.

Twitter was and in many ways continues to be the leading edge or “app” of this progression. From its inception in 2006 – a year before the first iPhone – Twitter was used for the sending and receipt of messages on cell phones. In this role, Twitter served (and still serves) as a sort of a public diary, in which people – ranging from being unknown by anyone except their friends and family, to celebrities of all kinds – can give all followers a constant (“streaming”) report of their daily, hourly, momentary doings, however trivial or profound. It is this constant reporting on the self that engenders the criticism of Twitter as superficial, but superficial is in the eyes of the beholder – you might find what my friend Tweets to be of no interest, but I may deem this to be of great value – and the Tweets of celebrities can be of keen interest to millions of people who are not their friends, regardless of the content, or whatever the favorite celebrity may choose to Tweet.

A significant feature of cell phones and now smart phones is their GPS capacity, or their indication of the precise location of where on the Earth they and presumably, but not necessarily always, their owners may happen to be. Twitter in the past year gave all of its users the option to have their location automatically listed under their profile names. The result is that anyone who reads a Tweet online – in cyberspace – can usually know if the Tweeter is still at the office, home, on vacation, or out to dinner (if these places are in different areas). Foursquare, a post-Twitter system launched in 2009, improves upon communicating the

Tweeter's locatability by providing exact addresses and coordinates.

6. Cyberspace Meets Realspace on Twitter and Foursquare

In my 2003 book, *Realspace: The Fate of Physical Presence in the Digital Age, On and Off Planet*, I examine the necessity of face-to-face interactions, with the possibility of reaching out and touching, in a world in which communication was increasingly being done via electrons or codes transmitted online. Whether these codes created email or video, the result then and now is still something very different, and in crucial senses less, than pre-technological physical communication.

Live video communication –or video phone communication –has become easier than ever before, and in fact is a feature of many smart phones (though in many cases the feature is only operational when both parties have same kind or even model of smart phone). It is thus highly significant that these same smart phones (and tablets such as the iPad) are also making it easier than ever before to integrate cyberspace and real space. As I argued in *Realspace*, the integration of these two realms –the capacity to switch from cyber to in-person communication at will –is the path to the future.

So significant is this realspace option, that a Twitter-like system emerged which does nothing other than facilitate and accentuate the capacity to move from digital to physical communication. Foursquare encourages users to “check in” with a note about wherever they may happen to be in the real, analog world. In fact, Foursquare cannot even be used –except as a means of posting reviews of restaurants and places –on a desktop or even

a laptop computer. The “check in” app requires a smart phone or tablet—that is, a device which is intrinsically mobile, and which we would be likely to have in our pocket when we visit a restaurant or other analog place in the normal course of our lives (in contrast to deliberately going to a place to check-in, which is discouraged on Foursquare). And what could be a more natural merging of digital and realspace than going to a restaurant, checking in on Foursquare, and being joined unexpectedly by a friend in the vicinity who happened to catch your check-in on Foursquare?

Indeed, Twitter’s implementation of the location feature was no doubt a result the success of Foursquare, and highlights another aspect of media evolution in general and of Twitter in relation to other media: embracing of a successful competitor’s features.

7. Twitter and Facebook as Healthy Competitors

As the 2010 movie *The Social Network* makes very clear, social media are not created in vacuums. Rather, their creators are usually completely aware of what other social media do, and the creators use this knowledge to make their media as both original yet appealing as possible to what people already know and like in similar online systems. Facebook’s creator Mark Zuckerberg was thus well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of Facebook predecessors Friendster and MySpace when he created Facebook in 2004. Twitter’s emergence in 2006 set it and Facebook onto a competitive, mutually admiring relationship which is still proceeding at full speed today.

Facebook tried to buy Twitter for \$500 million in 2008

("Facebook," 2011). The deal fell through, but this led Facebook to introduce all sorts of Twitter features, such the @ symbol to a create a link to a user's profile when the @ is placed before the user's name. The "Twitterization" of Facebook, however, was incomplete and not mutual – most of Facebook remains not at all like Twitter, and Twitter made no changes to make it more like Facebook. These differences are what make the Twitter/Facebook symbiosis so useful. They each bring separate advantages to the user's table (or, in the case of smart phones, the user's hand).

The ways in which Twitter is not like Facebook provide an additional perspective from which to understand Twitter. There is but one photograph on the Twitter profile of each user, no videos attached to the Twitter profile, and just one link allowed. In contrast, Facebook has a dossier of photographs, videos, and links for every user, put up in the case of many users over years of time. More than any other social medium, Twitter thus lives in the present. Its written communication is in many ways more like speech than any other kind of writing, and the writing that has the most in common with Twitter may be letters written in the sand.

The ephemerality of writing in the sand was brought home by the 1931 song "Love Letters in the Sand" (made more popular by Pat Boone in the 1950s). The fleeting quality of Twitter also makes it an appealing theme for the arts.

8. Twitter in the Arts

As Gawker.com – a media news and gossip site – puts it (Tate, 2010b), "CBS picked up mommy blogger Kelly Oxford's sitcom in at least the third Twitter-to-TV deal at the network in the last year. Microblogging may feed on life's most banal moments, but that

only makes TV executives love it more.” The two other Twitter-inspired show are “Shh… Don’t Tell Steve” and “S#! My Dad Says”. Aside from the banality—which Gawker is not claiming is Twitter’s only characteristic—the TV sitcom is also well matched to the fleeting, life-in-the-present essence of Twitter.

Robert Blechman’s *Executive Summary* (2010)—a “twitstery,” or droll mystery novel written entirely in 140—character real time Tweets—shows how Twitter can serve as the foundation of another kind of art, in this case, the mystery novel that first emerged as a form of popular culture in the mid—19th century works of Edgar Allen Poe. The works of Poe are still widely read today. Whether Blechman’s will survive into the 22nd century remains to be seen, but his novel demonstrates that the snapshots of thought which comprise Twitter can be molded into a more durable form. We might say that a novel such as Blechman’s is to a Tweet as a painting is to a snapshot taken on a cell phone or a digital camera.

Our Little Song: A Film about Tweeters—a documentary in the making by Ken Hudson—is a biography of Twitterers that will consist of brief video clips of interviews of the subjects and other audio-visual material. As Hudson noted in an email to me, the documentary seeks “to replicate in a cinematic manner the compilation of inputs that is Twitter.” Thus not only the topic or content but the process or medium of *Our Little Song* is an expression of Twitter.

Twitter’s significance in the present is thus demonstrated by its contribution to these various creative works. Art, however, implies an importance not only in the present but the future. The Library of Congress’s decision in the United States to maintain an archive of all Tweets since 2006 (Bierly, 2010) means the lifeblood of Twitter will be preserved in the foreseeable future. But will Twitter be the vital force in the future that it is today?

9. The Future of Twitter

In a recent interview on MSNBC-TV (2011), media theorist Douglas Rushkoff saw an uncertain, even dismal future for Facebook, and cautioned that we should not assume that the social media giants of today will be as big tomorrow, or even still alive.

That is worthwhile advice in general, but the survivability of any medium can best be assessed by application of a theory of the evolution of media which articulates principles that explain why some media thrive and others die as they move into the future.

My *Human Replay: A Theory of the Evolution of Media* (1979) developed such a theory. Why did radio (sound only) not only survive the advent of television (sound and sight) but thrive, whereas silent movies (sight only) faded away as soon as *The Jazz Singer* (a “talkie,” or motion picture of both sight and synchronized sound) appeared in theaters in 1927. My “anthropotic” theory – “anthropo”=human, “tropic”=towards – first explained how media evolve to more human communication forms and patterns. The abstract code of telegraphic communication was replaced by the literal human voice of the telephone, black-and-white photography was supplanted by color, etc. Humans both see and hear, which explains the obliteration of the silent movie by the talkie, but why then did radio survive the introduction of television?

The short answer is that sound-only radio had attained a human-media ecological niche, whereas sight-only silent movies had not. The world grows dark every night but not ever silent (sound-only), and we can easily close our eyes and continue to hear (that is indeed why alarm clocks are able to wake us up in the morning). In contrast, the 24-hour day is not comprised of almost 10-12 hours of silence – the acoustic equivalent of darkness – nor do we have “ear lids” with which we could close our ears as easily

as our eyelids allow us to shut our eyes. Thus, sound-only radio has done well in the age of sound-and-sight television because sound-only communication is as natural and fundamental to human life as is sight-and-sound communication. But the sight-only silent movie was pushed off the stage, because it corresponded to no fundamental mode or niche of human communication.

Is Twitter, in terms of survivability, more like radio or silent movies? The demise of the telegraph shows that the short form, for all its significance in human communication, is no guarantee of media survival, or a free pass for admission to the future. In order for Twitter and its short form to survive, it would need to embody and express other crucial aspects of human communication—in particular, those not addressed by the telegraph.

One of the cardinal characteristics of the telegraph was the distance it put between sender and receiver. Ironically, the informational price paid for the instant electronic communication of the telegraph was that the sender could not send a telegram from home. Instead, the sender of the telegram had to go in person to a telegraph office, from which the message would be sent to another telegraph office, and then sent out for physical delivery by hand much like a special delivery piece of mail (Express Mail, in today's parlance) to the recipient. The speed of the telegraph, in other words, was hostage to its weakest, slowest link: the requirement of non-electronic physical, in-person initiation of the telegram, and the same for its delivery.

And, in fact, one of the great advantages of the telephone was that it removed the need for the physical middlemen required by the telegraph. The caller and recipient of the call on the telephone could speak to each other directly. Twitter excels in this type of direct communication. Indeed, the great appeal of the celebrity on Twitter is that she or he is sending out the Tweets, and presumably

reading the Tweets of others. This is why Twitter introduced the “verification” feature, which provides a blue check or tick mark next to every celebrity that Twitters verifies as being him or herself. (The need for such verification stems from the difference between all online text systems versus those that use voice and video images in real time. You can verify in the voice or image of the face that the person to whom you are conversing is the person you know or may want to know. This is not the case when all you have on your screen is faceless, silent text. See Levinson, 2009, chapters 6, 7, 11 for more on social media deception.)

But are the direct sender-to-receiver qualities of short Tweets enough to make their survival likely (not necessarily guaranteed, because nothing is guaranteed in media evolution)? The view of cognitive anthropologist Alexander Marshack (1972) that we humans are intrinsically a narrative species –we love the stories we tell about ourselves, to others and ourselves, and indeed we live to tell them, and live by these stories –may provide some help in predicting the future of Twitter.

The stories capable of being communicated via the short bursts of the telegraph were necessarily impersonal –who would feel comfortable expressing deep personal feelings to a telegraph operator in an office? –as well as being indirect. Since in the creation of each Tweet no one is reading the Tweet, or is privy to it, except the Tweeter, the Tweets can be highly personal and indeed are. This is ironic, since the 140-character messages from the heart and soul or whatever part of the brain become in principle and possibility global once they are put on Twitter. Indeed, unlike the telegraph’s messages, which are interpersonal (one person to another) not mass communication (one person to many), the messages sent on Twitter are intrinsically both interpersonal and mass communication. But so far, this has not stopped Tweeters from communicating all manner of feelings.

The illusion of privacy engendered by the Tweeter looking not at another person but just at her or his screen is apparently enough to eliminate or at least reduce reticence and reservations, among those who are not already extroverts, about making private communication public.

The celebrity on Twitter is not likely to be shy about making some part of his or her life public, but the readers of celebrity Tweets assume that more of the private life of the celebrity is made public on Twitter than in traditional media forums. The public can already read about their favorite celebrities in magazines, see them on the mass media screens of television and the movies, can certainly see interviews of celebrities on television (and on newer media such as YouTube), but the public understands, on some level, that all such expressions of the celebrity are processed –that is, produced by some sort of publicity apparatus, and therefore in that sense not fully authentic. Although there is no guarantee that even a verified celebrity who is Tweeting is in fact that celebrity and not some appointed assistant, the expectation of a celebrity Tweeting is nonetheless that it is a communication from the celebrity less prepared and rehearsed, and therefore more real, than what is seen of celebrities in the mass media.

These factors conspire to make the short stories on Twitter uniquely appealing in their provenance as well as form, and bode well for Twitter's long survival into the future. This does not mean that the course for Twitter will be smooth and assured –the way of evolution, whether for organisms or media, is ever uncertain. Further, the inevitable propensity for error in all things human means that Twitter could be the victim of a bad decision by its executives. The departure of Twitter co-founder Evan Williams (he also created Blogger, also known as Blogspot) from his Chief Executive Officer position at Twitter in October 2010 would be one such already known example –Williams acknowledge that he

“screwed up in many, many, many ways” (Tate, 2010a).

But Twitter amply survived whatever errors Williams may have made. Twitter put its only early competitor, Pownce, out of existence by December 2008 – a classic example of the survival of the fittest in media evolution, which works the same as survival of the fittest in the biological world, except we the human species make the selections. Twitter resisted Facebook’s bid to take it over. The best estimate one can make today is that humans will be Tweeting well into the future, whatever we may choose to call such short, omni-producible and omni-receivable messages about ourselves.

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