

Twitter: Dead or Alive?

Is Twitter an over-inflated balloon that has lost its way? Or is it a fast-growing social media broadcast platform that's about to go profit ballistic?

The answer reveals a lot about the gap between our expectations and the reality of social media as it enters its mature phase. Because, of course, the answer is 'both'.

Adrienne LaFrance and Robinson Meyer [writing in the Atlantic](#) strike a chord for someone like me who uses Twitter as an interactive tool for getting information, sharing my work and connecting people to interesting research and analysis. And, sometimes, having fun or arguments with friends and strangers. As

[LaFrance/Meyer point out](#), this kind of thing is becoming harder as Twitter gets much bigger and has far more people on it who are not active or even attentive.



The Atlantic suggests Twitter is a whale blubber

The publishing platform that carried us into the mobile Internet age is receding. Its influence on publishing will remain, but the platform's place in Internet culture is changing in a way that feels irreversible and echoes the tradition of AIM and pre-2005 blogging. A lot of this argument comes down to what we feel.

The first caveat with any Twitter analysis is that there is no such thing as 'Twitter'. There is only your experience of Twitter based on who you follow or who gets into your timeline. But allowing for that, [the Atlantic article makes a case](#) that Twitter is no longer such a good place for exchanging ideas and making interesting connections. There is too much volume and too much of [what Nate Silver calls 'noise'](#).

Twitter, it argues, is now too fragmented into 'filter bubbles'. Those who are on Twitter (like almost all UK political journalists for example) are only talking to each other. While it can be a useful 'meet-up' place for some conversations, it does not have a role as a genuinely open forum. This may be the consequence of what is usually seen as a Good Thing. As [has been pointed out at nauseum](#) the media elite are no longer the gatekeepers to information and debate. But the Atlantic article argues that now means that interesting people like Ezra Klein or women who don't like the abuse, are abandoning an active role on Twitter.

The counter-claim was [put neatly by Will Oremus on Slate](#). Though, funnily enough he doesn't actually contradict the Atlantic's disillusionment. In fact he revels in the fact that Twitter is now the place to go if you are a major celebrity and want to reach millions of people without having to reply.

Oremus makes it clear that Twitter is now not pretending to be a social network, instead it is a platform:

As a social network, its chief function is to help friends, family, and acquaintances keep in touch. Media platforms, by contrast, connect publishers with their public. Those connections tend not to be reciprocal.

In this analysis it doesn't even matter if a large proportion of the people signed up to Twitter never look at it. The

important thing is that Twitter allows a piece of content such as that artfully staged Oscar selfie (which wasn't even really a selfie) to go big on other social networks, and most importantly, on mainstream media.

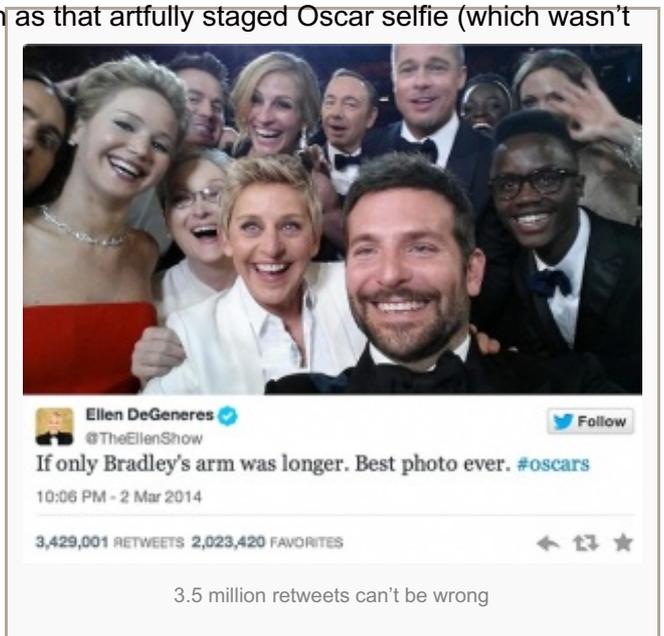
Oremus is probably right that Twitter is going to become more like YouTube than Facebook. It is a public platform that will tap into a large 'indirect' audience who don't even have accounts.

Now that might be an accurate vision of the future for the blue bird, but it's also precisely what those people at the Atlantic say is a place they didn't want it to go.

I think that this is an interesting example of how consolidation of new media technologies happens once the first wave of innovation has opened up new platforms, networks and audience behaviours. The money is clearly in a new media version of old broadcast rather than social for social's sake.

Update:

Alex Marsh from Bristol University has written something v interesting along similar lines: [Does Twitter's Future Lie In Broadcasting](#) that I recommend.



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