The Evolution of Twitter

Jeffrey Wood

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Introduction: When you hear the word tweeting, some people assume it’s a bird tweeting. But what it’s really referring to is the social networking site, Twitter. Twitter has evolved into the leading social networking site across the world. There are some benefits with using Twitter. But with every website that becomes popular, there are criticisms, different opinions, and issues they face on a constant basis.

Background: “Twitter is an online social networking and micro blogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as "tweets".” (Wikipedia, 2011) The site was created by Jack Dorsey who is now the chief executive officer of Twitter along with 10 other people in San Francisco, California. Along with the idea of creating Twitter, they decided to put some limitations on how much you can say about your daily life. When using Twitter, you are only allowed to type in 140 characters or less. This means you are very limited when typing a message on Twitter. The use of hashtags which is displayed as # is a common feature on twitter. The purpose of using # hashtags is to relay a message about a similar topic as someone else that has the same topic.

Potential Benefits: There are many benefits when using the Twitter website. Unlike Facebook, Twitter is an easier site to navigate through because there are only a few things to do such as send a message, tweet, and upload a twitpic. There are also many benefits if you are in the business market. The use of user friendly mobile devices allows you to communicate smoothly with other consumers and business people. For example, if you are the Apple Company and you plan to release the new iPad 3. You can use twitter to let your consumers know what to expect out of the product with very little detail because of the use of 140 characters or less. “The fact is you do not want to be too promotional, but Twitter does present the opportunity to promote your products or service and brand to your friends.” (Jody, 2009) You can use it when

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you have also release your product and get feedback from your customers to see their reaction to it. The feedback allows business companies to decide on what the next product will be or what improvements can be made on it.

Twitter has changed social networking because we are allowed to communicate in a more efficient way. The way we use twitter is the way news is spread out. For example, when the earthquake hit the East Coast, Twitter was on overload because Twitter users were on Twitter talking about it. Another benefit of using twitter is for personal use. Most people use twitter for personal tweeting. For example, Twitter users will tweet about what they are doing that day or about an event they are going to attend such as “I can’t wait to go to that #Adele concert on December 21st at the Patriot Center”. Another benefit is the use of talking to celebrities that you might not otherwise ever meet. The use of celebrities using Twitter is quite growing and expanding across the world.

Social Problems: With the creation of Twitter, there have been major social impacts and issues. From countries protesting for a change in government, free speech, banning Twitter and Wikileaks as issues. Countries such as Egypt, China, North and South Korea, and some Middle Eastern countries that have limited and no free speech have had issues with its citizens and the use of Twitter. For example, “In 2009, Iran used twitter as a site to organize several protest against the government because of their utterly disappointment in the presidential elections. While the Iranian government has tried to block Twitter posts, Iranian are very skilled at using proxy sites to maneuver around the blocked site. As twitter was about to have a global upgrade to its system, the Department of State asked Twitter to delay its upgrade in order for the Iranians to organize their protests. Twitter delayed the upgrade and the protests were organized”. (Mark Lander, 2009).
“Other social problems have been in China related to Twitter. When the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protest was arriving, China quickly blocked Twitter for good. A new version of Twitter popped up in China called Sina Weibo”. (Wenxin, 2011) With this site, you cannot post anything relating to a bad image about the government or they will shut down your account. Basically, it’s a new way to monitor you. This was an example of how places such as China have limited speech.

Most of the users that start protests and country uproar through social networking sites such as Twitter are users in the age group of 18-30. This classifies them as the younger generation. The older generation did not grow up with the advancement of technology like we do now so they are not as accustomed to using social networking sites to get their message heard. Another fact is that the older generation has faced consequences of speaking out against the government so they keep quiet. It’s the younger generation that is fearless and will go as far to use Twitter to get their messages heard in limited free speech countries.

Legal and Ethical Standards: “As exhilarating as social networking tools like Twitter can be, they also raise a variety of legal issues concerning the right of publicity,” says intellectual property attorney Jonathan Faber. (Faber, 2009) Some legal cases and issues that have risen are people that have made fake Twitter accounts with someone else name and they would tweet as if they were saying it. “There was one case were Tony LaRussa, a St. Louis cardinal manager claimed that someone created a false Twitter account. It claims that an unauthorized page that used La Russa’s name to make light of drunken driving and two Cardinals pitchers who died, damaged La Russa’s reputation and caused emotional distress.” (Faber, 2009) There have been also cases where people were being imposters of celebrities which also caused legal cases to come about to Twitter.
Some businesses have refrained from using Twitter because of ethical standards. It really poses the question of what’s ethical to you. What might be ethical to you might not be ethical to another person or entity. One company in particular is the Ann Arbor SPARK. “Ann Arbor SPARK said Twitter presents different ethical questions. They said SPARK policy would prohibit executives from posting messages about meetings with businesses considering local expansions, for example. So much of what we’re doing isn’t for public purview, but that’s what people would be interested in. We just don’t talk about projects before they’re announced, SPARK said”. (Rigg, 2009)

Security Concerns: This also raises another question, is too much information being sent out from Twitter? Are they vulnerable to hackers and viruses? Are they a secure website? As a user, are you putting too much info about yourself that people that mean harm can see?

Twitter is a site that you have to take great responsibility for as a user because whatever you put out there is posed as a risk. Just because it happens to other people does not mean being hacked won’t happen to you. It has even happened to news corporations such as Fox News. “The Twitter account, @foxnewspolitics, one of many operated by Fox News, claimed that the president had been fatally shot while campaigning in Iowa, but gave no source for the news. The person that hacked it is unknown.” (Robbins & Stelter, 2011)

Other sites such as Google and Facebook automatically use the HTTPS as their default so that when you enter the site, it’s already encrypted. These sites also have a security code that you would have to input in to confirm the identity of the user. “Twitter spokeswoman Lynn Fox declined to say whether the company intended to add two-factor authentication. The company has said in a blog that it hopes to make https encryption the default for all users.” (Finkle & Strom, 2011)

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Further required research: Twitter has some future developments. One of them is the following. “The company also plans to incorporate its own link-shortening feature so users don't have to use outside services like bit.ly and tinyurl, which let users shorten Web site links and keep tweets within the 140-character limit.” (Needle, 2010) Another future development of Twitter is to make it user friendly because it’s very hard to sign up because of the required steps.

Conclusion: Twitter is a social networking site that has change the global market. It might not be as big as Google and Facebook but eventually, it will share 1/3 of that market that these sites are already a part of. Twitter was started 5 years ago and now it has took off into another arena. Throughout Twitter’s society and security issues, as of today Twitter still stands as an influential development in technology.
Bibliography


Annotation: This article was helpful because it showed the legal issues involved with Twitter.


Annotation: This article was helpful in showing how Twitter needs to upgrade it's security system from potential hackers.


Annotation: This blog showed the business benefits of using Twitter which helped me show the benefits of using Twitter.


Annotation: This article really helped me with explaining the social and political problems around the world and how Twitter was a major influence in these issues.


Annotation: This blog helped me explain the future plans of Twitter and their future developments


Annotation: This article really helped me explain how Twitter becomes a problem in some countries that have limited free speech.


Annotation: This article shows how a lack in security on Twitter's behalf allowed a hacker to get into a major news services' Twitter and cause worldwide problems.

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Annotation: This article shows how China blocked Twitter in order to keep privacy within their country.


Annotation: Even though this is from Wikipedia, this site gave me great background on Twitter so I thought it would be useful.